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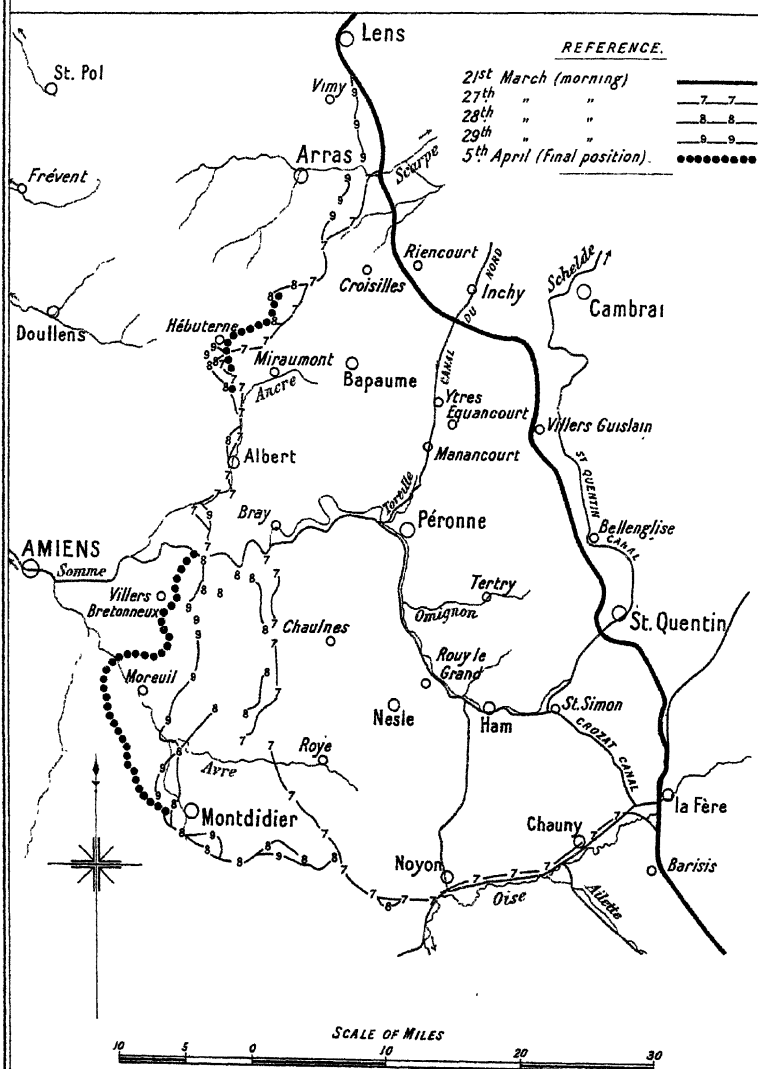
HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR
MILITARY OPERATIONS

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Sketch 1.

GERMAN ADVANCE 27th March — 5th April.



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

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HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

BY DIRECTION OF THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

MILITARY OPERATIONS

FRANCE AND BELGIUM, 1918

MARCH-APRIL: CONTINUATION OF THE GERMAN OFFENSIVES

COMPILED BY

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR JAMES E. EDMONDS

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MAPS AND SKETCHES COMPILED BY

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MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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1937

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first draft of this Volume :

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ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA TO "1914" Vol. I (1933 Edition)

(Kindly pointed out by various correspondents)

*Page xxvi. Under "F.O.A." At end, after "Battle of the Marne." add : "the positions shown being those it was supposed by French G.Q.G. to be occupying at the time."

*Page 60, line 36 (3rd para., line 3). For "defeat" read "repulse".

*Page 117, line 14. For "disorganized" read "partially disorganized".

*Page 218, lines 31-2. For "saved the left flank of the French Army." read, in inverted commas, "powerfully contributed to ensure the safety of the left flank of the French Army."

Page 256, line 1. After "word of explanation." add : "to the III. Corps or 4th Division, in accordance with a personal agreement made between Major-General Allenby (Cavalry Division) and General de Cornulier (Provisional Cavalry Division) at Compiègne, which assigned Verberie to the British left."

*Page 326, line 24. For "which, as will be seen, it failed to do." read "which was eventually done, but only in the afternoon of the 9th."

*Page 328, line 3. For "The I. Corps also did little during the day" read "The I. Corps could only progress a short distance during the day"

*Page 328, line 21. For "The Ninth Army had a disastrous day." read "The Ninth Army had been severely assailed and compelled to fall back, but though badly shaken had kept its line unbroken."

*Page 330, lines 11-12. For "fell back in panic, or was driven back, although the French make no claim to have done so." read "was driven back in panic by a night attack of the French 36th Division (XVIII. Corps)."

*Page 342, lines 20-31. For "General Franchet d'Espèrey, too, had contributed little . . . well under way." it was proposed by General Halbwachs to substitute : "General Franchet d'Espèrey's share in the victory might have been greater had he not been obliged to assist Foch's left wing, and even

** Indicates corrections suggested by General Halbwachs when head of the "Service Historique" of the French General Staff in 1935.*

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA

to succour it by the loan of his X. Corps. His I. and III. Corps had wheeled to the right, following the right of Bülow's Army, which had swung back eastwards; by so doing they widened and maintained open the gap between Kluck and Bülow into which the B.E.F. was successfully progressing. His XVIII. Corps and Conneau's cavalry corps had kept touch with the right wing of the B.E.F. and safeguarded its flank."

It must be pointed out, however, that General Joffre directed that General Franchet d'Espèrey's Army should attack "south-north", whilst Foch covered its flank (see "1914" Vol. I. (3rd edition) p. 548), that is, its task was offensive: it was not "obliged" to diverge from its purpose to assist the defensive wing.

Page 65, lines 13-14. After "the bridge at Obourg" add footnote:

"Whilst D Company of the 4/Middlesex was engaged in throwing up entrenchments at Obourg it was fired on by cavalry and the fire was returned. The cavalry in question was the *6th Squadron of the 16th Dragoons* (three squadrons of which formed the divisional cavalry of the *18th Division, IX. Corps*). The following is the account given in the regimental history, pp. 145-6:

'At midday [on the 22nd August] the *6th Squadron* received orders to reconnoitre the canal crossings east of Mons and Obourg. At 4.30 P.M. the squadron lay north-west of Obourg engaging with fire a strong enemy, who held the canal crossings [cyclists and British cavalry]. As the object of the reconnaissance was achieved, the fight was broken off and a report sent back. Two squadrons returned to Gottignies. Unfortunately there were notable losses on the reconnaissance: 2 men had fallen, 4 were missing and many horses were killed and wounded.'

The divisional cavalry of the *17th Division* (the other three squadrons of the *16th Dragoons*) was ordered to send out two officer's patrols, one towards Villers St. Ghislain and the heights north of Harmignies (six miles S.S.E. of Mons), the other towards Houdeng and Maurage (six miles east of Mons). They encountered the cavalry which was covering the I. Corps front. The first patrol heard from inhabitants that there were British in front, and was fired on; the second actually saw troops in British uniform near Maurage, before being driven off by fire. These reports reached divisional headquarters about 10 P.M. There is no mention of them reaching General von Kluck."

Page 220, line 2 from foot. Delete "1/Black Watch". This battalion was in reserve to the front line and dug a trench across the Oisy—Etreux road.

Page 335, line 5 from foot. For "by the 65th (Howitzer) Battery" read "by two guns of a German field battery", and delete the last line and first three lines of p. 336, adding footnote: "Recent investigations (see Colonel Pugen's in *Revue de Cavalerie*, January 1933, p. 127, and 'Lauenburgisches Feldartillerie Regiment Nr. 45', p. 29) make it clear that it was a section of *No. 5 Battery of the 45th Field Artillery Regiment* which fired on the Lincolnshire. The diary of the latter unit states it was fired on with shrapnel, whilst the 65th (Howitzer) Battery was firing H.E."

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA TO "1915" Vol. I

(Kindly pointed out by various correspondents)

Page 220, line 10 (end of first para.). Addendum issued with "1915" Vol. II should be amended to read :

Add footnote :

"The second order did not reach the battalions concerned until much later, for it was about noon when the 5/Durham L.I. crossed the canal and the 5/Green Howards followed some time afterwards."

Page 276, line 22. After "next day." add footnote :

"With regard to the supersession of General Sir H. Smith-Dorrien by General Sir H. Plumer see General Sir C. Harington's 'Plumer of Messines' containing an extract from one of Lord Plumer's letters, dated 30th April 1915, in which he says :

'It is not fair because Smith-Dorrien and I were in 'absolute agreement as to what should be done, and I am 'only doing now exactly what I should have been doing if 'I had remained under Smith-Dorrien.'"

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA TO
"1916" Vol. I

(Kindly pointed out by various correspondents)

Page 436, footnote 1, line 1. For "entirely" read "almost entirely"
and not as stated in the Addenda and Corrigenda issued with
"1918" Vol. I.

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA TO "1918" Vol. I

(Kindly pointed out by various correspondents)

Page 47, line 9 from foot. For "(Lieut.-General Sir R. H. K. Butler)" read "(Lieut.-General Sir W. Pulteney)".

Page 55, line 16. Delete ", in England,".

Page 86, line 12. For "councillor" read "counsellor".

Page 99, footnote 1. Add at the beginning :

"It is stated by a C.R.E. that nearly every man had been wounded, some three times; all were in a weak condition, many still convalescent."

Page 123, footnote 1, para. 3. At end, after "notice boards.", add :

"The position was to be completed by the troops who occupied it, and to indicate its approximate site to them it was considered best to dig a continuous line".

Page 126, line 10. For "Le Catelet" read "Catelet (14 miles N.W. of St. Quentin)".

Page 144, footnote 3. For "Coursing" read "Hare Drive".

Page 195, line 80. For "south-west" read "south-east".

Page 204, lines 5-6. For "the howitzer battery" substitute "five guns of one battery".

Page 209, footnote 1. Add at the beginning :

"There were also some belts of wire along the canal, at Jussy in particular, with shallow trenches including a support line, made by the French. They were not shown on the defence maps."

Page 228, footnote 2, last line. For "It had never been in any serious action" substitute :

"It suffered heavy losses 26th September-3rd October 1917 in the Battles of Menin Road and Polygon Wood".

Page 267, line 5 from foot. For "Noreuil" read "Noureuil".

Page 280, line 3 from foot. For "20th Division" read "30th Division".

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA

- Page 282, line 10 from foot. For "Br.-General R. W. Morgan" substitute: "Lieut.-Colonel C. J. Wyatt (temporarily commanding the brigade)".
- Page 343, line 14. For "36th Division" read "30th Division".
- Pages 343, line 4 and 501, line 22. For "Griffiths" read "Griffith" and make corresponding correction in Index.
- Page 347, lines 6-5 from foot. For "Wyatt, commanding the engineer company," substitute: "Wyatt, commanding it, the engineer company".
- Page 348, footnote 1, lines 3 and 7. For "F. G. Bayley" read "G. F. Baylay".
- Page 390, lines 19-20. For "in converting trenches . . . semblance of a position. It" read "in improving the reserve position, on which they had fallen back. By the care of the XVII. Corps it was a good one, consisting of two lines of trenches well wired, with excellently sited machine-gun defences and deep dug-outs. But its completion".
- Page 445, last line of footnote. For "127th" read "126th".
- Page 471, footnote 2, line 1. Delete "(less artillery)" and for "on the 25th" read "on the 25th-26th".
- Page 524, line 7 from foot. For "19th Divn." read "9th Divn."
- Page 534, line 13. After "headquarters back." add: "In others a notification from them of the signal route prepared, by which the divisions were to fall back, was mistaken for an order to retire."
- Page 551. Index. For "Lieut. F. G. Bayley" read "Lieut. G. F. Baylay".
- Page 551. Index. Under "Butler, Lieut.-Gen." delete "47".
- Page 562. Index. Under "9th Division" add "524 ;"
Under "19th Division" delete "524 ;"
- Page 563. Index. Under "4th Australian Division" for "relieves 19th" read "relieves 9th".
- Sketch 6, in left hand top corner. For "Coursing" read "Hare Drive". The German is *Hasenjagd*—coursing is forbidden by law in Germany.
- Map 9, in area of 66th Division, near Biaches. For "2/4th E. Lan" read "2/5th E. Lan".

SPECIAL ADDENDUM TO "1918" VOL. II.

The comments of the Portuguese military authorities were received by H.M.'s Embassy at Lisbon in December 1936, but owing to the time taken at Lisbon to translate them, they were not received in the Historical Section until the 24th February 1937, when the volume had gone to press. The general criticisms offered in them are :—

- (1) No attention was paid until the 6th April to the reports sent in by the Portuguese of the various signs of preparation for attack which they had observed since the beginning of March.
- (2) The British 55th and 40th Divisions, on either side of the Portuguese 2nd Division, formed defensive flanks prematurely, " which resulted in both "flanks of the Portuguese Division being left unprotected, thus allowing "the penetration of the Germans through these open breaches".
- (3) Portuguese units, side by side with the British, contributed assistance particularly in the defence of Marais S. Post until after 4 p.m., of La Couture, which did not surrender until 11 a.m. on the 10th April, and in the holding of the Lawe line.
- (4) The artillery, as a whole, held its positions until rushed by the enemy.

The corrections suggested are as follows :

Page 141, line 4. After " surprise attack " add : " —of which the Portuguese had detected signs for some weeks and duly reported—".

Page 147, lines 3-4. For " was a quiet sector " substitute : " had been a quiet sector ".

Page 147, line 12. After " informed him " add : " in view of the wideness of its front ".

Page 147, line 18. After " British troops." add : " A suggestion made by Colonel Sinel de Cordes, Chief of the Staff of the Portuguese Corps, that each division should be distributed in depth, with a brigade in each of the three lines, was not accepted."

Page 148, line 9. After " the front was not reduced " add : " , although General da Costa informed his corps commander, General Tamagnini, that he declined all responsibility for what might happen as the result of manning so wide a front with weakened effectives ; "

Page 161, line 8 from bottom. After " breastworks." add : " , which, however, were in a bad state owing to constant shelling."

2 SPECIAL ADDENDUM TO "1918" VOL. II.

- Page 165, line 9 from bottom. For "a mounted A.D.C." substitute: "an A.D.C. in a car"; and for "an hour" substitute: "half an hour".
- Page 165, lines 6-5 from bottom. For "occupy . . . Battle Zone." substitute: "man the Village Line."
- Page 166. The paragraph beginning "About 6 a.m." should be placed later in the narrative, as the second paragraph on page 173; for it was, it is said, not until 11 a.m. that General da Costa took this action.
- Page 167, line 18. Delete the words: "with rifles taken from the Portuguese".
- Page 167. Add to footnote 2: "Later Portuguese accounts would make the time between 9 and 10 a.m."
- Page 167, last line. "A party of thirty". Portuguese accounts say: "Almost the whole of the 18th Infantry Battalion and three platoons from the 15th".
- Page 171, line 21. For "crowds" substitute: "considerable numbers".
- Page 172, lines 14-23. "By 6 a.m. . . . immunity." As regards this incident, the Portuguese account is to the effect that "after 9 a.m. the Portuguese left was attacked by groups of Germans coming from the British sector."
- Page 173, line 5 from bottom. Delete "with most of its artillery".
- Page 175, line 14 from bottom. After "a couple of hundred Portuguese" add: "of the 15th Infantry Battalion".
- Page 177, line 5. After "Horse" add: "the men of the Portuguese 13th and 15th Battalions".
- Page 177. Add to footnote: "The casualties of the Portuguese are stated to have been 12 killed and 168 taken prisoner."
- Page 179, line 21. After "8/Durham L.I." add: "and men of the Portuguese 12th Battalion with it,"
- Page 185, line 4 from bottom. Delete "taking their artillery with them."
- Page 187, lines 8-4 from bottom. For "with no special interest . . . bombardment" substitute: "uncertain of their flanks, the officers and men did their duty as far as they could, and their retirement after a bombardment of exceptional severity."

PREFACE

THE previous volume carried the account of the great German offensive, begun on the 21st March 1918, up to the close of the 26th March, on which day General Foch, Chief of the General Staff of the French Army, was charged with the co-ordination of the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. The present volume covers the period 27th March to 30th April; it continues the account of the March offensive until its conclusion in front of Amiens on the 4th April, with the subsequent action of Villers Bretonneux on the 24th-26th, and gives the story of the "second act", the Lys offensive towards Hazebrouck, which was begun on the 9th April and brought to an end by General Ludendorff's order on the 30th.

The events described are of such national importance that it has been judged desirable to conclude the volume with a chapter of "Reflections". The other chapters tell of the difficulties of a Coalition War and of almost uninterrupted fighting, to which it is hoped that the sketches bound in the text will afford a useful clue. Notes on casualties and ammunition expenditure will be found at the end.

The operations, particularly the successful resistance offered, as presented on paper will appear more or less orderly and controlled, but this was far from being the case in reality: confusion, lack of information, uncertainty of the position of neighbouring units, hunger and fatigue, prevailed; these factors are only mentioned occasionally, but must be kept constantly in mind.

It has not been an easy task to ascertain what actually occurred. The war diaries of the period, as noted in the previous volume, are meagre, for the staffs of formations and units were too busy to keep them in the normal way, and there was the further difficulty that divisions were shifted from one corps to another, were frequently broken up and were usually supported by artillery of other divisions.

Some formations and units could not spare trained officers for the duty of diary keeping. Brevity is particularly to be found in the diaries of the artillery, which did such good service throughout.¹

I am greatly indebted to the large number of combatants to whom the first draft was circulated for providing explanations, filling gaps, and generally furnishing corrections, additions and suggestions. I trust that every one of them has received a letter of thanks and acknowledgment; but the number of correspondents was so large, running into over four thousand, that here I can only offer public thanks to them *en bloc*. Exception must, however, be made of Lieut.-Colonel A. Fortescue-Duguid, D.S.O., Director of the Historical Section of the Department of National Defence, Ottawa, who furnished his own comments and obtained those of other Canadian officers concerned; and of Dr. C. E. W. Bean, M.A., LL.D., the Australian Official Historian, who not only read the draft and wrote most valuable criticism, but sent the advanced TS. copies of the chapters of his own 1918 volume, now in process of compilation. His help was most essential, as the action of Australian divisions in front of Albert and Hazebrouck and at Villers Bretonneux was of a decisive character. For the Air operations I had advantage of the publication of Volume IV. of the Official History "The War in the Air", and the personal assistance of its author Mr. H. A. Jones, M.C.

In disentangling the events in the narrative I have also had the benefit of Tome VI. Volume I. of the French Official History which covers the period. Further, General Blin, the head of the *Service Historique* of the French General Staff, has been kind enough to read the second draft and furnish corrections and suggestions, for which I tender him my most grateful thanks; but he is in no way responsible for the narrative or the opinions expressed in it. He writes that I have sometimes been "*un peu dur pour nous*". The fact is that the French troops, sent

¹ The following are the entries in the war diary of the C.R.A. of a division for two important days in April:

"25th April: Concentration at 4.55 A.M., following on several S.O.S. calls from 2.45 onwards. 2 P.M. concentration. [One] battery heavily shelled and pulled back 700 yards. French continually getting information of impending attack, counter preparations being continually ordered. Concentration from 10 till 12 midday. Usual harassing fire and large expenditure of ammunition.
"26th April: Counter preparation at 4.30 A.M. and 6 P.M. A quiet day. Usual harassing fire."

up in haste, generally without ammunition columns and sometimes without officers' horses, did not show at their best when they came to British assistance in March-April 1918. This seems to confirm the soundness of Marshal Foch's oft repeated axiom that reliefs must not be carried out in the midst of a battle.

After "1914" Vol. I. (3rd Edition) had appeared, General Halbwachs, General Blin's predecessor, suggested some corrections to it. They are included in the "Addenda and Corrigenda" issued with this volume, being placed first and distinguished by an asterisk.

The German Official History has not yet reached 1918. Lieut.-Colonel W. Foerster, the well-known military writer, now the head of the *Forschungsanstalt für Kriegs- und Heeresgeschichte*, which has assumed charge of the writing of the German Official History of the War in place of the *Reichsarchiv*, has maintained the good relations established; he furnished information, which I most gratefully acknowledge, to clear up many points; he also had the positions of the German Armies, corps and divisions marked on the daily maps issued with this volume. German regimental histories, as ever, have proved most useful and reliable. Many quotations have been made from them to illustrate the nature of the fighting and to show that difficulties and heavy losses were not confined to the Allied side. The captured archives of the German Fourth Army for the period 1st-28th April proved very valuable, as they give the information available, the discussions held and the decisions taken in the higher commands.

During the War the Commander-in-Chief removed a number of senior officers from their commands; few allusions have been made in the text to these supersessions, as it was thought it would be unjust to make the names public: all were doing their duty to the best of their powers, and many failed solely on account of hardships endured, ill-health or previous wounds, whilst some had gifts for training troops rather than for command. Removal of an Army commander by the Government against the wishes of the Commander-in-Chief stands on a different footing, and is already within public knowledge: the account of the supersession of General Sir Hubert Gough in the midst of a battle is therefore given at some length.

The names of the officers who took part in the most laborious task of compiling the first draft of this volume are printed opposite the opening page of the Preface; but I have also received very great assistance from other members of the staff of the Historical Section (Military Branch), particularly from Mr. E. A. Dixon—who, to my great regret, had to resign in June 1936, for reasons of health, after 17 years' service in the Branch—and from Mr. A. W. Tarsey as regards clearing up points raised by correspondents; also from Captain W. Miles in revision and preparation for the press. I have again had the benefit of the invaluable criticism of the final draft by my brother-in-law, Mr. W. B. Wood, M.A. (Oxon.), and by Lieut.-Colonel H. G. de Watteville, C.B.E., M.A. (Oxon.), R.A. (retired), *p.s.c.*

All officers interested may not have seen the draft or proofs. I beg, therefore, as I have done in previous volumes, that any corrections or additions, and criticisms thought necessary, may be sent to the Secretary of the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, 2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1. At the same time, I offer my thanks to those who so kindly furnished corrections for the earlier volumes. A sheet of "Addenda and Corrigenda" is enclosed in this volume.

J. E. E.

September 1936.

The chapters in which the Portuguese forces are mentioned were sent to Lisbon in March 1936. No comments had been received by the middle of February 1937, when, as the delay was also postponing the publication in their turn of two other volumes of the War history, orders were given for printing off. Should it be necessary, any changes suggested by the Portuguese authorities will be issued as corrigenda with a subsequent volume.

J. E. E.

February 1937.

NOTES

THE location of troops and places is written from right to left of the front of the Allied Forces, unless otherwise stated. In translations from the German the order given is as in the original; otherwise enemy troops are enumerated like the British. Where roads which run through both the British and German lines are described by the names of towns or villages, the place in British hands is mentioned first, thus: "Albert—Bapaume road".¹

To save space and bring the nomenclature in line with "Division", "Infantry Brigade" has in the text been abbreviated to "Brigade", as distinguished from "Cavalry Brigade" and "Artillery Brigade"; and "Regiment" similarly means "Infantry Regiment".

The convention observed in the British Expeditionary Force is followed as regards the distinguishing numbers of Armies, Corps, Divisions, etc., of the British and Allied Armies, *e.g.* they are written in full for Armies, in Roman figures for corps, and in Arabic for smaller formations and units, except Artillery Brigades, which are Roman; thus: Fourth Army, IV. Corps, 4th Cavalry Division, 4th Division, 4th Cavalry Brigade, 4th Brigade, IV. Brigade R.F.A.; but for artillery brigades with numbers higher than one hundred Arabic figures are used.

German formations and units, to distinguish them clearly from the Allies, are printed in italic characters, thus: *First Army, I. Corps, 1st Division.*

The usual Army abbreviations of regimental names have been used: for example, "2/R. West Kent" or "West Kent" for 2nd Battalion The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment; K.O.Y.L.I. for the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry; K.R.R.C. for the King's Royal Rifle Corps. To avoid constant repetition, the "Royal"

¹ It was judged inadvisable to mark the roads on the situation maps, already overlaid with detail. They are shown on Map 13 for the Lys area.

in regimental titles is sometimes omitted. To economize space the 68rd (Royal Naval Division), the 14th (Light) Division, etc., are usually described by their numbers only.¹

First-line and Second-line Territorial Force units are distinguished by a figure in front of the battalion or other number, thus : 1/8th London, 2/8th London, 1/3rd London or 2/3rd London Field Company R.E., or, when the First-line and Second-line had been amalgamated, simply 3/London.

Abbreviations employed occasionally are :—

B.E.F. for British Expeditionary Force ;

D.A.N. for Détachement d'Armée du Nord ;

G.A.C. for Groupe d'armées du centre ;

G.A.E. for Groupe d'armées de L'Est ;

G.A.N. for Groupe d'armées du Nord ;

G.A.R. for Groupe d'armées de réserve ;

G.H.Q. for British General Headquarters ;

G.Q.G. for French Grand Quartier-Général (usually spoken "Grand Q.G.") ;

O.H.L. for German *Oberste Heeresleitung* (German Supreme Command). N.B.—"G.H.Q." in German means Grosses Haupt-Quartier, that is the Kaiser's Headquarters, political, military and naval, as distinguished from O.H.L.

R.I.R. (on maps) for Reserve Infantry Regiment.

The spellings of "lacrymatory" and "strongpoint" are arbitrary, and were selected as being shorter than the usual ones.

Officers are described by the rank which they held at the period under consideration. To save space the initials instead of the Christian names of knights are generally used.

The German pre-war practice of writing the plain name without "von", when it is applicable and no rank or title is prefixed, has been adopted, e.g. "Falkenhayn" and not "von Falkenhayn".

Summer Time for the B.E.F. began on the night of the 9th/10th March, but the German Army did not change over until the night of 14th/15th April ; thus, as German time is normally one hour ahead of Greenwich time, the clock times of the two Armies were alike during the period of

¹ The Yorkshire Regiment is usually called in the text by its ancient name "The Green Howards", and the composite dismounted cavalry formations and units are designated simply "dismounted brigade" or "dismounted regiment".

the March offensive, and the first six days' fighting in Flanders.

In order to save the repetition of words pointing out that a division or brigade had already lost heavily, the abbreviations " Divn " and " Bde " are employed to denote this condition ; and as the account of the fighting proceeds and certain formations become reduced to a remnant, the further abbreviations " Dn " and " Be " are used.

MAPS AND SKETCHES

THE maps provided in this volume for the conclusion of the Battles of the Somme, 27th March-5th April, consist of two sheets (north and south), with a slight overlap, for each of the four days on which the whole British Front was attacked. The other days are each given on a single sheet. No layered map of the Somme area is provided in this volume, as this layered sheet was included in the map volume issued with "1918" Volume I. To illustrate the Battles of the Lys a layered map of the battle front on the 1/100,000 scale is provided, as well as a daily situation map (in black and white) for each of the twelve days on which serious fighting took place. In addition, for military students, a map is provided to show the Rear Defences in the First and Second Armies at the time when the Battles of the Lys opened; and specimens of the defences in corps areas are shown on Sketches 8 (for the Somme) and on 15, 17, 28 and 31 (for the Lys).

The layered end-paper, Sketch A, is provided to show the general reader the ground which was fought over in the Battles of the Somme; and the other end-paper, Sketch B, shows the ground on which the Battles of the Lys were fought. In addition sketches illustrating each important day of the two battles are included in the text. These sketches indicate the general result of the day's fighting and the relation of the line occupied to the front line held at the opening of the battle.

The spelling of the place-names on the 1/80,000 French map and on the Belgian survey, 1/20,000, has been followed.

Mr. H. Burge drew the end-paper sketches and the daily situation sketches of the Somme and Lys for reproduction, and Mr. J. Fenton all the other sketches and all the maps.

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23. The Lys, 17th April 1918.
24. The Lys, 18th April 1918.
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26. The Lys, 26th April 1918.

LIST OF BOOKS

TO WHICH MOST FREQUENT REFERENCE IS MADE

BAVARIAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT (B.O.A.): "Die Bayern im grossen Kriege 1914-1918".

BOULLAIRE: "Historique du 2^e Corps de Cavalerie du 1^{er} octobre 1914 au 1^{er} janvier 1919". By General Boullaire. (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle.)

A comprehensive history of the corps commanded in 1918 by General Robillot.

FOCH: "Mémoires". By Maréchal Foch. (Paris: Plon.)

FOERSTER: "Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg". (2nd Edition 1925.) By Lieut.-Colonel W. Foerster. (Berlin: Mittler.)

The author was for long a member and is now Director of the *Forschungsanstalt für Kriegs- und Heeresgeschichte* (formerly the *Reichsarchiv*). His book, an examination of German strategy, is divided into three parts, the last of which deals with "the great battle in France in the spring of 1918".

FOURTH ARMY DIARY: The captured documents of the German *Fourth Army* for the 9th-30th April 1918, of which a French translation has been published: "La Bataille des Flandres d'après le journal de marche et les archives de la IV^e Armée Allemande (9-30 avril 1918)". (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle.)

FRENCH OFFICIAL ACCOUNT (F.O.A.): "Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre". Ministère de la Guerre: État-Major de l'Armée. Service Historique. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.)

"Tome VI., Volume I.", with two annexes containing documents, and a case of maps, covers the period dealt with in this volume.

GEHRE: "Die deutsche Kraftverteilung während des Weltkrieges". By L. Gehre. (Berlin: Mittler.)

An examination of the War from the point of view of whether O.H.L. succeeded in assembling for decisive action in time and space the highest possible number of troops. It contains a large coloured diagram on squared paper which shows, under the various fronts and Armies, the German strength in divisions on the 15th and last day of every month of the War.

GOES : "Der Tag X. Die grosse Schlacht in Frankreich 21 März-5 April 1918". By Captain G. Goes. (Berlin : Kolk.)

The author is an *Archivrat* in the *Reichsarchiv*. His book, founded on official records and regimental histories, gives a very vivid account of the fighting in March 1918.

GOES' KEMMEL : "Kemmel. Sturm und Sterben um einen Berg". By Captain G. Goes. (Berlin : Kolk.)

A detailed German account.

KABISCH : "Michael. Die Grosse Schlacht in Frankreich im Lenz 1918". By Lieut.-General E. Kabisch. (Berlin : Schlegel.)

An excellent general account.

KEMMEL : "Kemmel 1918". By A. Goutard. (Paris : Charles-Lavauzelle.)

A detailed French account.

KUHL : "Entstehung, Durchführung und Zusammenbruch der Offensive von 1918". By General von Kuhl. (Berlin : Deutsche Verlag.)

This is a most valuable source.

The author, the well-known Chief Staff Officer of General von Kluck in 1914, and later of Field-Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, was one of the three technical assistants of the *Reichstag* Commission which enquired into the causes of the loss of the War. His book contains the report which he made to the Commission, divided into five parts : The Relative Strengths, the Reinforcement and Supply of the Armies, the Decision to Attack, the Spring Offensives, and the Defensive Battle in the Summer of 1918.

LUDENDORFF : "Meine Kriegserinnerungen", and "Urkunden der Obersten Heeresleitung über ihre Tätigkeit". By Erich Ludendorff. (Berlin : Mittler.)

M.W.B. : The *Militär Wochenblatt*, in which a number of anniversary articles have appeared.

PERSHING : "Final Report of General John Pershing, Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces". (Washington : Government Printing Office.)

This covers both the period of organization and the operations.

PERSHING EXPERIENCES : "My Experiences in the World War". By John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief American Expeditionary Forces. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

General Pershing's personal story, founded on his diaries.

POINCARÉ : "Au Service de la France : Neuf Années de Souvenirs". By R. Poincaré. (Paris : Plon.)

An almost daily record of the War in ten volumes, the last of which covers 1918.

LIST OF BOOKS

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"REGT. No. . . ." These are references to the War histories of German regiments. The volumes vary in length and value: some give detailed accounts of the operations with extracts from the reminiscences of combatants; others merely reproduce the official war diaries. Some of the latter type have been superseded by fuller accounts.

RUPPRECHT: "Mein Kriegstagebuch". By Field-Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. (Munich: Deutscher National Verlag.)

The day-by-day entries are of great value, as four of the attacking Armies were under the command of the author.

SCHWARTE iii.: "Der deutsche Landkrieg". Edited by Lieut.-General M. Schwarte. (Leipzig: Barth.)

A compendium of the War in 12 volumes. Volume III. covers the operations on the Western Front from the time Hindenburg-Ludendorff took command until the Armistice, and contains extracts of operation orders and other useful matter.

VOLCKHEIM: "Deutsche Kampfwagen in Angriff 1918". By L. Volckheim. (Berlin: Mittler.) German tanks in attack in 1918.

WILSON: "Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson. His Life and Diaries" (two volumes). By Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell. (Cassell.)

Note:

"1914" Vol. I. The Official History of the Great War, Military Operations, France and Belgium, Volume I. (3rd Edition) (first part of 1914);

"1914" Vol. II. Do. do. Vol. II.
(close of 1914);

"1915" Vol. I. Do. do. Vol. III.
(first part of 1915);

"1915" Vol. II. Do. do. Vol. IV.
(close of 1915);

"1916" Vol. I. Do. do. Vol. V.
(first half of 1916);

"1918" Vol. I. Do. do.
(first part of 1918).

"EGYPT & PALESTINE" } Volumes I. and II. The Official History of the Great War, Military Operations.

"MACEDONIA", Volumes I. and II. The Official History of the Great War, Military Operations.

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

Mainly extracted from "Principal Events 1914-18" compiled by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, London. His Majesty's Stationery Office. 10s. 6d. net.

Western Theatre.	Other Theatres.	Naval Warfare and General Events.
MARCH 1918		
27th. Battle of Rosières : Montdidier lost by the French.	27th. <i>Russia</i> : German forces marching through the Ukraine. <i>Palestine</i> : First attack on Amman begins.	
28th. Battle of Arras.		
APRIL 1918		
		During this month 72 British merchant ships (gross ton- nage, 215,548) were lost by enemy action.
	1st. <i>Finland</i> : German Expeditionary Force leaves Danzig.	1st. Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service amalga- mated into the Royal Air Force.
5th. Battle of the Ancre brings the German offensive in Picardy to an end.		5th. British and Japanese marines land at Vladivostock.
9th. Battle of the Lys begins.		
10th. Messines lost.		10th. Third Military Service Act passed, raising age limit to 50.
11th. Armentières and Merville lost.	11th. <i>Palestine</i> : Turkish attack on Jordan bridgeheads.	11th. French Government publish text of Kaiser Carl's letter to Prince Sixte of Bourbon proposing peace negotiations.

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS—(concluded)

Western Theatre.

Other Theatres.

Naval Warfare and General Events.

APRIL 1918—(continued)

12th. Haig's "Backs to the Wall" order.
 12th. *Russia* : Erzerum retaken by the Turks.
 Capture of Odessa by the Germans.
Finland : Germans capture Helsingfors.

14th. Foch becomes Général en chef des Armées alliées en France.

17th. First German attack on Kemmel.

19th. *Russia* : German forces enter the Crimea.

20th. Lord Milner succeeds Lord Derby as Secretary of State for War.

23rd. Naval raid on Zeebrugge and Ostend.

24th. German attack on Villers Bretonneux.

25th. Second attack on and loss of Kemmel.

30th. *Palestine* : Second Action of Es Salt.

CHAPTER I

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY

27TH MARCH 1918

THE GENERAL SITUATION

(Map 1 ; Sketches A, 1, 2, 3)

ON the afternoon of the 26th March, the sixth day of battle, when the opening of a breach between the French and British Armies appeared inevitable, General Foch, the Chief of the French General Staff, had been charged by the representatives of the French and British Governments, assembled in conference at Doullens, to take steps to secure the co-ordination of the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front.¹ Overpowered by the onslaught of three German Armies, the *Eighteenth, Second* and *Seventeenth*, in which no less than seventy-six divisions

Sketches
A, 1.

¹ See "1918" Vol. I. General Foch's Staff, at first purely for operation purposes, consisted of about a dozen staff officers, with General Weygand as his Chief of Staff, and Colonel Desticker as Sub-Chief, together with sufficient officers for registration, cypher, translation, and the administration of the headquarters. In August, an Administrative Staff under Colonel Payot, with the title of Direction générale de Communications et de Ravitaillement des Armées, was added to it.

On 30th March, Br.-General C. J. C. Grant (G.O.C. 1st Brigade) and Lieut.-Colonel E. FitzG. Dillon (British Mission at G.Q.G.) were sent to General Foch's headquarters as liaison officers ; but on 12th April, a British Mission under Lieut.-General Sir John Du Cane (G.O.C. XV. Corps) was attached to it. Br.-General Grant was transferred to this Mission, with Lieut.-Colonel J. A. F. Cuffe, G.S.O.1 (Intelligence), Major K. J. Martin, G.S.O.2, and a cypher officer. The principal duties of the Mission were to give General Foch exact information at any time as to the situation of the British forces, and to act as intermediary, when required, between General Foch and the British C.-in-C., and between General Foch and the War Office, particularly the C.I.G.S. It was also required to undertake the delicate task at times of providing information from Allied headquarters. As a matter of routine, the head of the Mission wrote a letter every evening to the C.I.G.S. (or D.M.O.) giving the news, situation, etc. In the course of time the other Allied Armies were similarly represented.

had been identified,¹ the British Fifth Army (General Sir Hubert Gough) and the right of the Third Army (General the Hon. Sir Julian Byng) had fallen back fighting some twenty-five miles to a front marked roughly by the line Guerbigny (6 miles west of Roye)—Hébuterne. The arrival of French assistance to fill the gaps in the Fifth Army front, and the swinging back of the right of Byng's Army, had enabled an unbroken line to be maintained in spite of heavy casualties and loss of ground. To put the general situation as shortly as possible: the Fifth and Third Armies, pivoting on Roeux (6 miles east of Arras), had wheeled back, so that the right originally near La Fère now stood west of Roye. The 30-mile gap thus created on an east-west line had been filled by the French; but the British III. Corps (three divisions) and the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divns² had remained with our Allies. Lacking these five divisions, the two British Armies were still holding a line only eight miles shorter than that of the 21st.

The fact that the front was still intact had not always been realized in the back areas, nor even at some of the higher headquarters; for the scene on the roads leading to the rear presented many of the signs of disaster. Not only were inhabitants fleeing with their worldly possessions loaded up on every kind of transport vehicle, but rumours that the enemy had broken through seemed confirmed by the number of men in uniform—principally belonging to transportation units, labour corps and similar formations—who were drifting to the rear.

At the conclusion of the operations on the 26th March, when the Fifth and Third Armies received General Foch's first instructions, to the effect that not an inch more ground should be given up, the general distribution of the Allied troops on the front between the Oise and the Scarpe (Arras) was as follows.

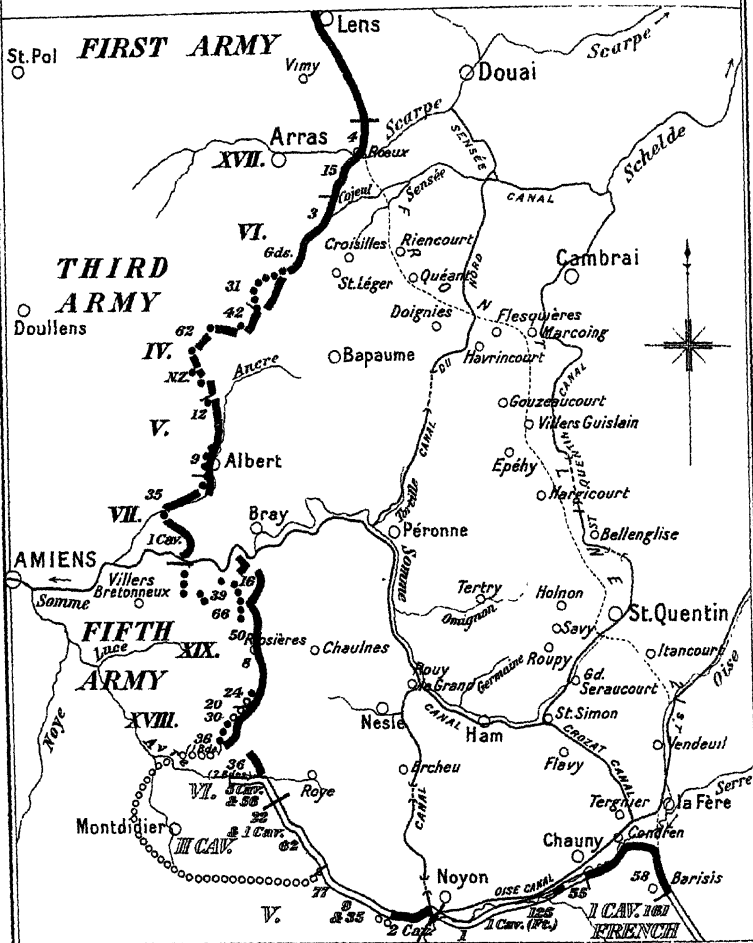
Sketch 2. The right of the great pocket formed by the enemy in the Allied front was held by remnants of the British III. Corps and the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divns, which had formed the original right wing of Gough's Army, and by French reinforcements, organized as the French Third

¹ Leaving, according to the Intelligence Section at G.H.Q., still twenty-five divisions in reserve.

² To remind readers, without repetition of the words "the remnants of", that certain divisions and brigades had suffered heavily in the previous fighting, these formations are indicated by the shortened spelling of "Divn" and "Bde".

Sketch 2.

27TH MARCH.



REFERENCE.

Line 27th March British French. 28th March a.m. British French.
 Army boundaries Corps boundaries

SCALE.

Miles 10 0 10 20 Miles

Prepared in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

Army (General Humbert).¹ The bottom of the pocket was held by the French VI. Corps (the leading element of another French Army, the First, under General Debeney, containing only one division and a cavalry division); the XVIII. and the XIX. Corps of Gough's Army; and the VII.² and V. Corps of Byng's Army. The left side, which extended to the neighbourhood of Arras, was occupied by the remaining three corps (the IV., VI. and XVII.) of the latter Army. Actually, the link between the French Third Army and the British XVIII. Corps was formed by the French 5th Cavalry Division, spread out thinly to cover a front of three miles, as the rest of the VI. Corps, the 56th Division, had not completed detrainment.

The French Third and First Armies formed the new Group of Armies of Reserve (G.A.R.), under General Fayolle. Parts of twelve divisions and two cavalry divisions had arrived,³ and they had relieved the British 14th and 18th Divns (III. Corps) and the 3rd Cavalry Divn, which, however, all remained with them in reserve; the 58th Division of the III. Corps and the 2nd Cavalry Divn were still in the French line.

For the sake of unity of command, not only the British III. Corps and the two cavalry divisions with it, but the remainder of the Fifth Army (XVIII. and XIX. Corps), south of the Somme, had been transferred, by mutual arrangement, from the command of Sir Douglas Haig to that of General Fayolle, so that the Somme now formed the boundary between the forces of these two commanders.

In the northern half of the battlefield, north of the Somme, the front of the Third Army was regarded as stabilized, although the defence was handicapped by the lateral north and south railway communication, the Amiens—Arras line, being interrupted by the presence of the Germans in Albert. General Byng had received

¹ "In the course of the retirement of the Third Army during the latter part of March, the boundary between the [French] Third and Sixth Armies [originally Barisis] followed practically the line of the Oise as far as south of Noyon." F.O.A. x. (i.), p. 365.

² The VII. Corps had originally been in the Fifth Army, but most of it had been transferred to the Third, so that the Somme might be the boundary between the two Armies.

³ Of these, four, the 125th, 55th and 1st and the 1st Dismounted Cavalry Division, passed on the 26th from the Third to the Sixth Army, as a result of change of Army boundary. At the same time from being the XXXV. Corps (General Jacquot) these divisions became the I. Cavalry Corps (General Féraud), General Jacquot taking over command of the 36th and 70th Divisions as a new XXXV. Corps on the left instead of the right of the Third Army.

reinforcements, sufficient it was hoped, to enable him to maintain his position; there were plenty of trenches in the old battlefield area of 1916, now again the scene of conflict, which could be utilized for defence. No real anxiety was felt for this Army, nor for the G.A.R.: the danger point lay between them.

The 29 British divisions which had been in the line on the 21st March,¹ after six days' fighting against heavy odds, and six nights—indeed seven, for that of the 20th/21st had been somewhat agitated—without chance of proper rest, were now very tired. They were also much reduced in numbers, not only by battle casualties and sickness, but by the straggling to the rear of men who had lost touch with their units, or whose strength of purpose or courage had failed. But the spirit of the bulk of the survivors was unshaken, their line unbroken, and they were determined to continue the fight. Nine divisions had arrived, four from the G.H.Q. reserve and five from other Armies, to reinforce them: three on the 22nd March (8th, 31st and 41st); three (35th, 42nd and 62nd) on the 23rd; one (New Zealand) on the 24th; one (12th) on the 25th; and one (4th Australian, sent south on the 24th from the Second Army) on the 26th.² Of these nine reinforcing divisions, only one, the 8th, had been allotted to the Fifth Army south of the Somme.³

Map 1.

Sketch 2.

Two French corps (V., and II. Cavalry) under Generals Pellé and Robillot, forming, with the new XXXV., the Third Army, now held the right of the battle line, having relieved most of the British III. Corps; but, since their divisions had come in haste leaving their batteries to follow, the artillery of the British divisions had to serve in the place of the 75's, while the III. Corps heavy artillery also remained in action on that front. The French VI. Corps (General de Mitry) had taken over part of the front of the XVIII. Corps up to the Avre. In addition to the parts of twelve French divisions and two cavalry divisions already in the line, five more French divisions and another cavalry division were approaching the battlefield; three more were on the way to it, having entrained on the 25th or 26th; a further six were under orders, issued on the

¹ Including the three (the 20th, 50th and 40th) in immediate reserve.

² The 3rd Australian and 5th Australian Divisions were on their way south from the Second Army to an area west of Arras.

³ The 35th was sent to the VII. Corps on 23rd March, but next day, being north of the Somme, was transferred to the Third Army. See "1918" Vol. I., p. 418.

24th, to join the G.A.R., but only one of these arrived before the 5th April in time to be engaged in the battle before Amiens.¹ These reinforcements were used to strengthen the French line already established and not to relieve the British except the 58th Division and 2nd Cavalry Divn.

North of the front held by the French, the British XIX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir H. E. Watts) had fought stoutly, and had fallen back in good order. The hard-hit XVIII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir I. Maxse) had clung to the right of the XIX. in order to make sure that, if separation between the two Allied Armies should come about, it might be left with the British forces, and would not have to retire away from them with the French. On the night of the 26th/27th, the remnants of three divisions of the XVIII. Corps, and of the six divisions of the XIX. Corps, held a good position, extending to the Somme, with the fourth division of the former (61st) and part of Mesple's Group (the French 133rd Division and 4th Cavalry Division) behind the right centre. Owing to the penetration of the Germans into Erches, near the right of the XVIII. Corps, two brigades of the 36th Divn on the extreme right were in advance of and isolated from the rest of the XVIII. Corps, though in touch with the French on their right. On the left, too, owing to the retirement of the right of the VII. Corps (Third Army) on the 26th, in consequence of a misunderstanding, from Bray sur Somme to Sailly le Sec, there was an unguarded stretch of some six miles along the course of the Somme between the left of the XIX. Corps and the right of the VII. If the enemy, who had followed the VII. Corps as far as Morlancourt (about 3 miles north-west of the left of the XIX. Corps), could manage to cross the river in this six-mile gap, he would actually find himself in rear of the XIX. Corps.

The French infantry and cavalry, having come up piecemeal, with no more small-arms ammunition than what they carried on the person, and without their cookers and other transport, had been hustled back. In retiring they had sought to feel to their right and keep touch with the French Armies rather than to maintain connection with the British. Whether they would stand their ground now depended on the speedy arrival of ammunition, their own artillery, and further reinforcements. General Pétain,

¹ See Appendix 2, Order of Battle of G.A.R.

the French Commander-in-Chief, believing that his own front in Champagne would be attacked on the 26th, if not earlier,¹ had judged it dangerous to send more than a minimum of divisions to assist the British. On the night of the 24th, believing the British to be decisively defeated and unable to hold their ground, he had issued orders in which he had declared his intention to be :

“ Before everything to keep the French Armies together as one solid whole ; in particular, not to allow the G.A.R. to be cut off from the rest of our forces. Secondly, if it be possible, to maintain liaison with the British Forces.”²

In the circumstances this decision threatened the separation of the French and British Armies and the loss of the great railway junction of Amiens, the connecting link in the communications behind the front.

General Foch on assuming charge of the operations had made it clear that the position actually held must be maintained at all costs, that the French and British troops, remaining closely in touch, must cover Amiens, and that further reinforcements must be brought up to consolidate the position of the British Fifth Army. These instructions he had communicated verbally to General Pétain, who had been present at the Doullens Conference ; and he had then proceeded to make personal visits or speak by telephone to the principal generals concerned.

To General Fayolle, he sent by General Barthélemy, the Chief of the Staff of the G.A.R. whom he met at General Gough's headquarters at 4 P.M., the following written message :

“ In order to ensure at any cost the protection of Amiens, General Fayolle is invited to :

“ (1) Maintain at all costs the position actually held by the British Fifth Army south of the Somme, La Neuville [500 yards south of Bray sur Somme]—Rouvroy —Guerbigny.

“ (2) Support, and then, as soon as possible, relieve the British Fifth Army south of the Somme, without for that reason risking the area south of Roye, and for that purpose defending the ground foot by foot.”

In his interview with General Debeney (First Army) at 7 P.M. on the 26th, General Foch had confirmed the orders which he had already given by telephone : the

¹ See “ 1918 ” Vol. I., p. 154, f.n. 1.

² See “ 1918 ” Vol. I., p. 449.

French First Army was to relieve the British XVIII. Corps, which was to become reserve to the XIX. ; it was to maintain the position then being held and to keep touch with the right of the XIX. Corps then at Rouvroy. General Debeney, on receipt of General Foch's telephoned orders, had at 6 P.M. directed General Mesple¹ to go to Moreuil, take under his command the British XVIII. Corps, the 133rd Division,² and 4th Cavalry Division,³ and support the British troops on the right (east) bank of the Avre as French troops arrived for the purpose. At 10.30 P.M., after General Foch's visit, General Debeney amended his instructions and directed General Mesple to put himself at the disposal of Lieut.-General Maxse, commanding the XVIII. Corps, in order to assist him to hold his front. Lieut.-General Maxse himself was requested to carry out, first, the relief of the troops on the line Erches—Bouchoir (that is, his right) before undertaking other reliefs, so as to form a solid defence, well supported by artillery, on the lines named.

General Pétain also issued a written order, untimed, to General Fayolle, whom it reached at 9 P.M. :

“ The first mission of the Group of Armies of Reserve “ is to close the road to Paris to the Germans and to cover “ Amiens.

“ The direction of Amiens will be covered :

“ To the north of the Somme by the British Armies under “ Field-Marshal Haig, who will hold at all costs the line “ Bray sur Somme—Albert.⁴

“ To the south of the Somme by the Group of Armies “ of Reserve under your orders [British Fifth Army, French “ First and Third Armies], maintaining liaison with the “ forces of Field-Marshal Haig at Bray, and with the “ Group of Armies of the North on the Oise.

“ This instruction, which contemplates both main- “ tenance of the possession of Amiens and continuity of “ the Allied front between Somme and Oise, cancels all

¹ He had been sent to Amiens to take command of a cavalry corps which General Pétain intended to form on his left.

² The 133rd Division had been in reserve on the coast. It was ordered to Abbeville on the 25th by General Pétain. Only an advanced guard had reached Plessier, behind the right of the XVIII. Corps, on the 26th. It did not complete detrainment for some days.

³ The 4th Cavalry Division, from rest, had been brought up by rail on the 25th/26th to Conty (10 miles south of Amiens), and its advanced guard had reached Hangest, behind the right of the XVIII. Corps. Its detrainment was not completed until the 31st. F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 319.

⁴ It was not known that Bray had been abandoned.

"previous instructions, notably secret and personal instruction No. 26,226 of the 24th instant."¹

At the conclusion of the Doullens Conference at 3 P.M., General Pétain had instructed the Group of Armies of the Centre (G.A.C.) to send five more divisions to General Fayolle (G.A.R.).² They were to be replaced by four from the Group of Armies of the East (G.A.E.), which received in place of them the three American divisions, 2nd, 26th and 42nd, which were in training. Actually, only two of these five divisions (163rd and 67th) arrived on the battlefield during March, their leading troops being engaged on the 29th and 31st, respectively. Later, at 6.15 P.M., General Pétain ordered the transfer of three more divisions from the G.A.E., but they never reached the G.A.R.—one went to Champagne, one to Flanders, and the third to the Sixth Army, which was on the right of Fayolle's forces. Thus the material assistance which General Foch added to that already on the way to the Armies was not very great, and none of the new French divisions actually relieved the British. The change in the situation was brought about, first, by the moral effect of the action of General Foch, who, at a time when the momentum of the German attack had been diminished by heavy losses, fatigue and difficulties of supply, decided to stop the retirement and prevent the separation of the French and British Armies; and, secondly, by the arrival of substantial reinforcements in the shape of the 5th Division from Italy, the 1st, 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions, and the New Zealand Division, each 13 battalions strong.

Doubts of complete success had already entered the minds of our opponents. An official German writer says at the opening of his chapter on the 27th March: ³

"Before Bucquoy and Hébuterne the blood of Below's divisions had flowed in torrents; in vain had enormous sacrifices been made. The *Seventeenth Army* had been pinned to the ground. At one place only could the *Second Army* endeavour to shake off the numbing

¹ This order, involving the separation of the French and British Armies [from which a portion has been quoted above], is given at length in "1918" Vol. I., pp. 448-50.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 323, f.n. 1, says that, according to a letter of General Pétain's, dated 28th July 1930, "The executive order was given at 3 P.M., but the decision which led to it had been taken in the morning before General Pétain left for the Doullens Conference".

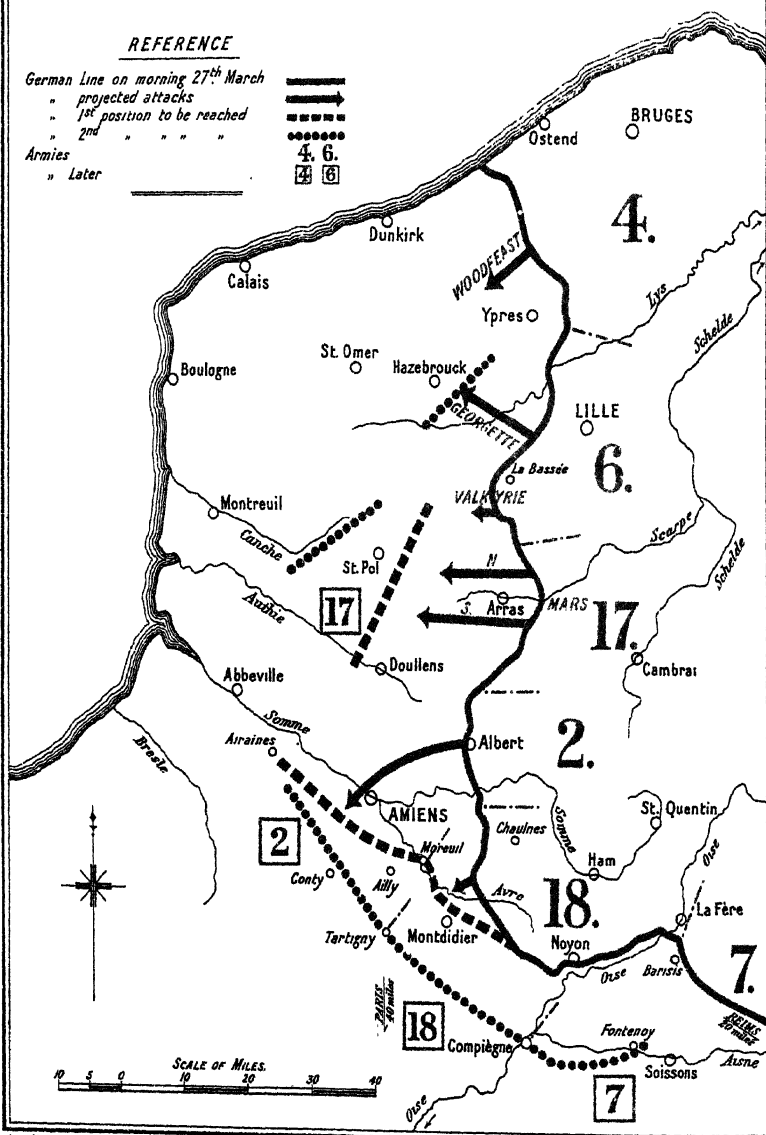
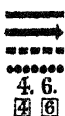
³ Goes, p. 147.

Sketch 3.

GERMAN PLANS.

REFERENCE

German Line on morning 27th March
 " projected attacks
 " 1st position to be reached
 " 2nd " " " "
 Armies
 " Later



SCALE OF MILES.
 10 5 0 10 20 30 40

"rigor that had come over it. All hopes rested on Hutier's *Eighteenth Army*, which, heavily reinforced, might be expected to push on."

Ludendorff, however, had no intention of letting the enterprise fail for lack of impulse from the Supreme Command. His orders issued on the 26th were for a general advance: ¹ the *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies* were to push south-westwards towards the Avre; Moreuil, on that river, half-way between Montdidier and Amiens, was named as their point of junction, Amiens to be captured by the centre of the *Second Army*; the *Seventh Army*, eastward of them, was to take part in the movement; the *Seventeenth Army* on their right was to continue to press westwards, assisted by the *Sixth* and *Fourth Armies* north of it. Translated into simple language, the orders meant that the *Seventh*, *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies* were to form a great barrier to keep off the French, whilst the *Seventeenth* and *Sixth* defeated the British, and the *Fourth Army*, the Belgians. Sketch 3.

The total British casualties during the 21st March and following days up to the 26th, inclusive, had been reported as 2,500 officers and 72,151 other ranks.² Medical arrangements had worked splendidly, and not a single man admitted to a hospital had been abandoned. A great number of stragglers had been collected behind the front; but until such men had been fed and rested the fighting generals preferred to be without them, so they were not, as a rule, immediately sent back to the line.

During the 23rd March and seven following days, a series of meetings of the War Cabinet had been held to determine what reinforcements could and should be sent to France. It was found that there were various drafts immediately available, amounting to 27,000; trained "boys" over 18½ and under 19 years, 50,000; training as officers, 5,000; trained soldiers in munition works, 29,000 (the number was subsequently put at 34,000), of whom 16,000 could be spared; 68,000 trained soldiers engaged in

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 536.

² The Adjutant-General, Lieut.-General Sir George Fowke, however, informed the Commander-in-Chief that these figures were probably over the mark, because the 34th Divn (which had been pulled out to rest on the 26th, see "1918" Vol. I., p. 530, f.n. 1) and other divisions sent back to refit had been found to muster more men than the estimates showed, owing to the return of "missing".

CHAPTER II

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*continued*)

27TH MARCH 1918

THE BATTLES OF THE AVRE AND OF ROSIÈRES ¹

(Maps 1, 2 ; Sketches 2, 3, 4, 5)

THERE was frost during the night of the 26th/27th March, which, except for some bombing and the prying of German patrols, most of which were captured, passed quietly. As on the previous days, a mist formed towards morning, but it was less dense and cleared earlier, leaving the weather dull and raw.

Map 1.
Sketch 2.

To epitomize the results of the fighting : no important success was won by the enemy except against the French First Army and the troops adjacent to it at the junction of the Allied Forces. From Noyon to Canny, the French V. Corps held its ground, but Robillot's corps ² swung back, pivoting on its right ; de Mitry's (VI.) corps, next to it, also fell back, slightly north of west, carrying with it the right of the British XVIII. Corps, which then formed a defensive flank. Thus, regardless of General Foch's order that not an inch of ground should be given up, folding doors, as it were, were opened for the Germans to enter. They promptly did so, advancing to Montdidier, which was occupied unopposed ; they also made a thrust across and along the Somme, through the six-mile span left open by the retirement of the VII. Corps on the previous day. The XVIII. and XIX. Corps, thus threatened on both

¹ These are, respectively, the French and British official names, and cover the fighting of the G.A.R. (27th-31st March) and British Fifth Army (26th and 27th March) ; there is no sub-name for that of the Third Army.

² It was called the II. Cavalry Corps because that was General Robillot's normal command, and he had his cavalry staff, but the corps consisted of two divisions and a cavalry division.

flanks, retired a short distance, after obtaining General Foch's permission to do so. North of the Somme the situation remained unchanged, the enemy making only slight gains of ground at two places, north of Albert near Aveluy, and on the VI. Corps front between Ablainzeville and Moyenneville.

There was some lack of water on the higher ground, but rations continued to come up daily to units; even the post, which had been irregular, was duly delivered. In places there was a shortage of small-arms ammunition, owing to carts and wagons having been sent to the rear; but careful formations which had retained their transport suffered no lack of it.

South of the Somme

Between Noyon, where lay the left of the French Sixth Map 1. Army,¹ and the Somme there stretched the Santerre, a great open area like Salisbury Plain on a larger scale, except that it was closely cultivated. On this ground now stood the G.A.R., under General Fayolle, which was composed of the French Third Army, consisting of the V. Corps (5 divisions),² the II. (Cavalry) Corps (22nd and 62nd Divisions and 1st Cavalry Division); the leading troops of the French First Army (56th Division and 5th Cavalry Division), with the heads of five French divisions and a cavalry division approaching the battlefield;³ and the British Fifth Army, consisting of the XVIII. Corps of four very tired divisions and the XIX. Corps of six divisions. Facing this total of eight French divisions and two cavalry divisions (with three British divisions and two cavalry divisions attached), and ten British divisions with one cavalry division, there were 28 German divisions, 13 on the French and 15 on the British front, eventually reinforced by part of another (the *1st*) from north of the Somme.⁴

¹ This Army was not engaged on the 27th March. The greater part of the British III. Corps was with it: the 58th Division in front line, the 18th Divn and 3rd Cavalry Divn in support and reserve.

² 9th, 10th, 35th, 53rd and 77th, with the British 2nd Cavalry Divn in the front line and the 14th Divn in reserve.

³ Part of Mesple's Group (133rd Divn and 4th Cavalry Division) joined the First Army during the 27th.

⁴ The German forces on this front were the bulk of the *Eighteenth Army* (its left corps now faced the French Sixth Army), and part of the *Second*.

[See over

At dawn on the 27th March practically the whole battle-front from Barisis to Roye was occupied by troops of the French I. Cavalry and V. Corps; the only British troops in action on it were the 58th Division (in the I. Cavalry Corps), and the 3rd and 4th Cavalry Bdes (2nd Cavalry Divn), which were interpolated among French troops of the V. Corps west of Noyon. In reserve were the 18th Divn around Audignicourt (8 miles south-east of Noyon);¹ the 5th Cavalry Bde, south-west of Noyon; the 3rd Cavalry Divn, 4 miles south of Noyon; and Harman's Detachment² and the 14th Divn at Elincourt (8½ miles W.S.W. of Noyon).

Under instructions from the Fifth Army, Lieut.-

Opposite the French :

	Divisions		
	in 1st Line	in 2nd Line	in 3rd Line
<i>Eighteenth Army :</i>			
<i>IV. Res. Corps :</i>	33rd (2), 37th (1), 103rd (1)		
<i>XVII. Corps :</i>	36th (1), 10th (2)	1st Bav. (1), 5th Guard (2), 238th (1)	
<i>IX. Corps :</i>	10th Res. (8), 9th (2)	45th (1)	51st Res.,* 231st (2)

Opposite the British :

<i>XXV. Res. Corps :</i>	206th (2), 28th (1), 1st Guard (3)	50th (1)	52nd *
<i>III. Corps :</i>	5th (2), 6th (2)	88th (1), 23rd (3)	113th (1)

Second Army :

<i>II. Corps :</i>	243rd,* 208th (1), Guard Ersatz (3)	19th (2)
<i>XIV. Corps :</i>	4th Guard (1) (rest of the corps was north of the Somme)	

A total of 16 in first line (of which 3 were fresh), 8 in second, and 4 in third.

(1) = In first line on 21st March.

(2) = „ second „ „ „

(3) = „ third „ „ „

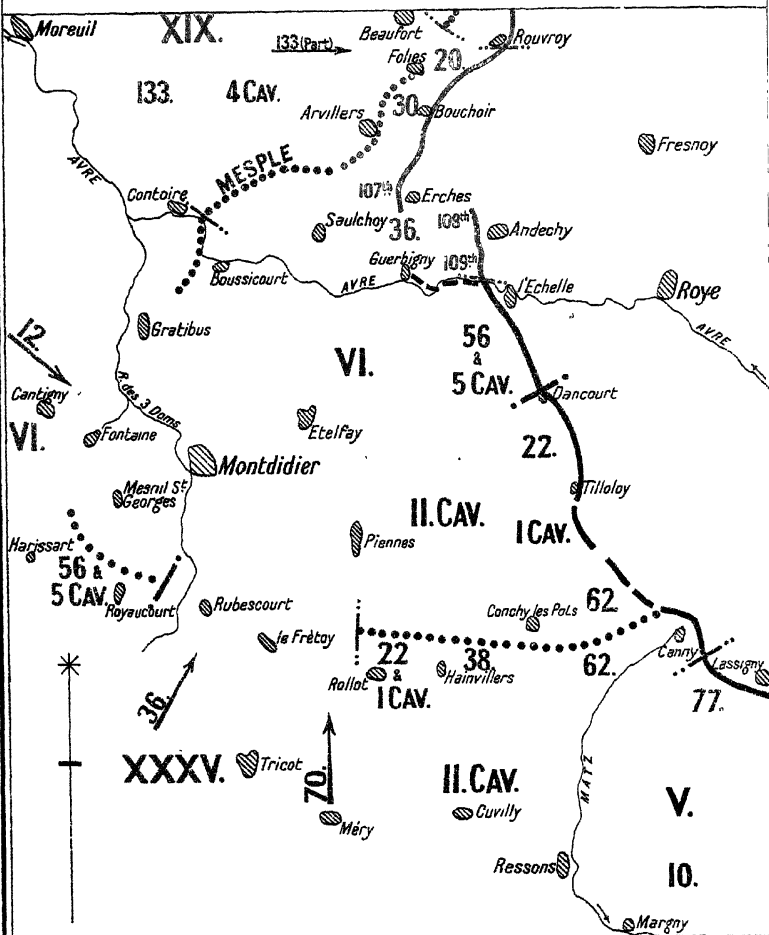
* Brought from Verdun—Champagne front.

¹ Some troops of the 18th Divn, viz. the 54th Bde, 80th Field Company R.E., and 8/Sussex (Pioneers), were on the 27th attached to the 58th Division. All the artillery of the three divisions and the heavy artillery of the III. Corps remained in action with the French.

² About 700 mounted men of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divns, 600 infantry (men returned from leave and reinforcements), with eight Lewis guns, under Major-General A. E. W. Harman, 3rd Cavalry Divn. See "1918" Vol. I., p. 334.

Sketch 4.

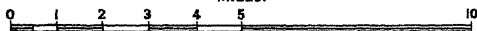
The Drive at MONTDIDIER 27TH MARCH.



REFERENCE.

	British.	French
Line on morning of 27 th	—————	—————
" at midnight.....
Army boundaries.....
Corps "

MILES.



General Butler (III. Corps), after consultation with General Pellé, at 9 A.M. issued orders to withdraw the cavalry and the 14th Divn (less artillery). The 2nd Cavalry Divn and Canadian Cavalry Bde were to concentrate west of Compiègne (13 miles south-west of Noyon), and rejoin the Fifth Army on the 28th. As events turned out, these troops were called on to assist the French near Montdidier on the 28th, and did not reach the Fifth Army until the 29th. The 3rd Cavalry Divn, leaving a mounted detachment of 300 men under Lieut.-Colonel A. B. Reynolds as escort of the corps heavy artillery, was to concentrate at Choisy (11 miles south-west of Noyon), and also rejoin the Fifth Army. The 14th Divn (less artillery) was to march from Elincourt south-westward to Estrées St. Denis to refit. These orders were carried out without difficulty.¹

On the front of the French V. Corps, from the Oise to near Canny, there was fighting throughout the day. The field of fire was good, and the 35th and 77th Divisions, which now held the line, repulsed all attacks with heavy loss to the enemy (*37th, 103rd and 36th Divisions*): "very soon General Pellé ceased to have any anxiety for his front".

Next on the left, Robillot's corps at first held its own against the attacks of the German *10th and 10th Reserve Divisions*; but about 10 A.M. the centre was driven in, and by noon the 1st Cavalry and 22nd Divisions were retiring westward. The 62nd Division, on their right, seeing that its left flank was now open, fell back, pivoting on its right, which remained in touch with the V. Corps at Canny. By evening, the line of Robillot's corps ran from Canny to Rollot, facing north, instead of east as it had done in the morning, and the way to Montdidier lay open to the enemy. The infantry of the 22nd Division was by

¹ The casualties of the III. Corps for the period 21st-27th March, estimated on 31st March after most of the stragglers had rejoined, were :

		Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
58th Division	{ Officers . . .	2	18	19	832
	{ Other Ranks . .	71	247	475	
18th Divn	{ Officers . . .	30	49	99	2,445
	{ Other Ranks . .	110	421	1,736	
14th Divn	{ Officers . . .	17	31	90	3,197
	{ Other Ranks . .	133	496	2,430	

Originally the losses of the 58th Division were reported as over 1,400, but more than 600 men subsequently rejoined. In other divisions likewise, the losses were much less than first reported. The wounded include lightly wounded, as the proportion 363 killed to 1,262 wounded would suggest. For the total casualties see Chapter XXV., Note I.

The situation on the right of the XVIII. Corps was stabilized towards evening by the arrival of the leading troops of Mesple's Group (the advanced guard of the 133rd Divn and a brigade of the 4th Cavalry Division), which had been placed under Lieut.-General Maxse's orders, and by him had been detailed to relieve the troops of the 20th and 30th Divns.¹ At night, although General Gough, on his way to see the 24th Divn, had assured himself, by personal visits both to Lieut.-General Maxse and General Mesple, that the arrangements were perfectly understood, the French troops took over, not all the front intended but only that of the 107th, 59th and 61st Bdes and the divisional troops of the 36th Divn. The two brigades of the 20th Divn remained in close support, but the rest, on completion of the relief about midnight of the 27th/28th, marched back with the remnants of the 108th Bde to Sourdon (7 miles north-west of Montdidier). There the 36th Divn, except several parties which remained in the line, managed to concentrate. It was now reduced to considerably less than half of its original infantry strength, but had the satisfaction of knowing that it had done much to hold back the enemy on every day of the battle. The 20th and 30th Divns remained in the line awaiting relief, while the infantry of the 61st Divn, in reserve, was ordered northward to Villers Bretonneux. Owing to events on the left flank of the XIX. Corps, however, it was diverted by lorry to Marcelcave, some three miles south-east of its first destination, where it arrived very early next morning.² The gap around Montdidier remained open all night; but towards the morning of the 28th a thin covering line had been formed by the arrival of the head of the French 36th Division, which came into line between the 70th Division and the VI. Corps, and of the head of the 12th Division, which filled the space between the VI. Corps and Mesple's Group. As there were no reserves near at hand, at 9.15 p.m. General Pétain, acting under

¹ The units were so mixed up that only relief by areas was possible.

² The gross losses of the XVIII. Corps for the period 21st-27th March, including lightly wounded and absentees who rejoined later, are recorded as :

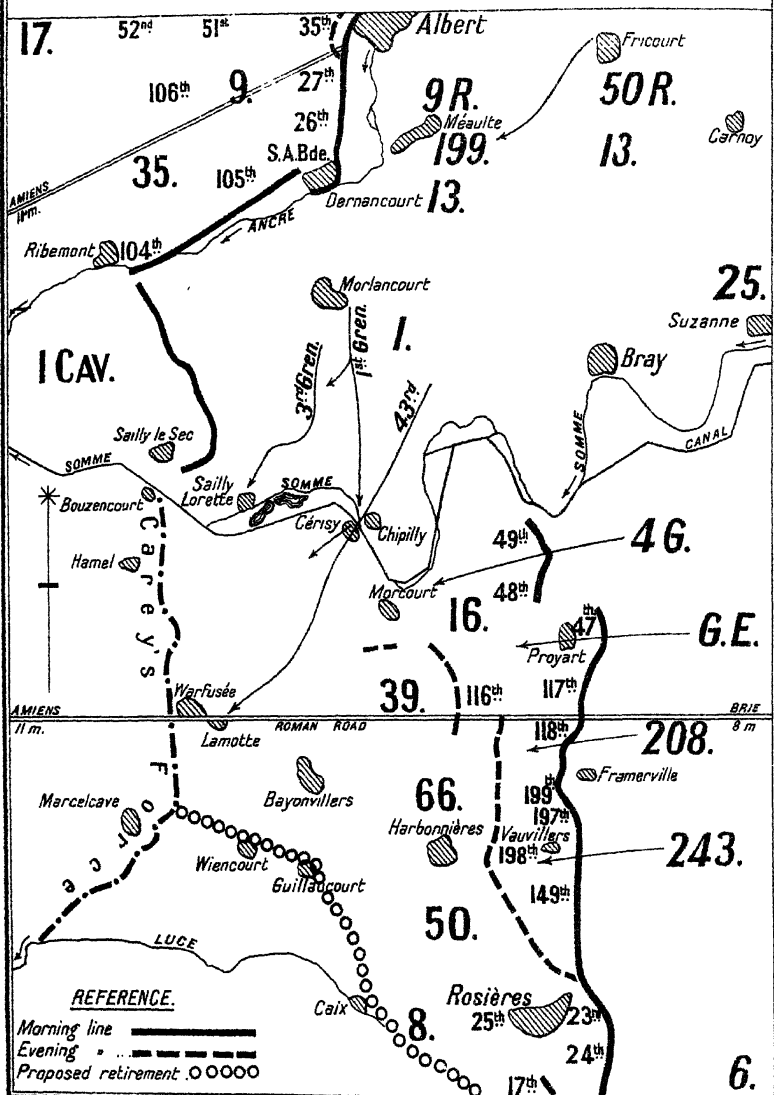
								Officers	Other Ranks
20th Divn	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	225	4,779
30th "	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	236	4,815
36th "	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	236	5,873
61st "	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	213	5,328
								910	20,795

For the total casualties see Chapter XXV., Note I.

Sketch 5.

27TH MARCH

Between the Luce & Ancre.



General Foch's instructions, ordered the 162nd Division to be sent by lorry from the Sixth Army to Rollot, in order to support the left of General Humbert's Third Army.

The struggle on the nine-mile front of the XIX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir H. E. Watts), between Rouvroy and the Somme, held by six divisions, 24th, 8th, 50th, 66th, 39th and 16th—all of these except the 8th, which came up on the night of the 23rd/24th, had been in action since the beginning of the battle—was very severe and stubborn.¹ The corps had no reserve except Carey's Force, organized on the previous day, about three thousand strong—nearly all engineers of units other than field companies, and including five hundred American railway troops who had no military training—with 16 Vickers and 76 Lewis guns. Lieut.-General Watts had under his command more divisions and more men than Wellington arrayed on the field of Waterloo, and fought on the 27th March on a wider front, for a longer time and against heavier odds than did the Duke on the 18th June 1815. There being many days of fighting still to chronicle, the events of this important battle can only be summarized.

Attacking the XIX. Corps were eleven German divisions, of which only five had originally been in the first line, and Lieut.-General Watts had received orders that the line was to be maintained at all costs until the arrival of French troops. His front might be expected to hold its ground, as indeed it did. The danger to his southern flank, on which stood the very weak XVIII. Corps, was obvious owing to the German thrust towards Montdidier; but his anxieties

¹ The G.O.C. XIX. Corps Artillery was Br.-General W. B. R. Sandys, and G.O.C. Heavy Artillery, Br.-General C. G. Pritchard.

Under the 24th Divn (C.R.A., Br.-General E. S. Hoare-Nairne) were H and I Batteries R.H.A., two batteries R. Canadian H.A., and the 106th, 107th, 251st and 311th Brigades R.F.A. (86 guns).

Under the 8th Divn (C.R.A., Br.-General J. W. F. Lamont) were the 16th Brigade R.H.A., 23rd, 33rd and 45th Brigades R.F.A. (73 guns).

Under the 50th Divn (C.R.A., Br.-General A. U. Stockley) were the 86th and 250th Brigades and one battery of the 47th Brigade R.F.A. (52 guns).

Under the 66th Divn (C.R.A., Br.-General A. Birtwistle) were the 4th Brigade R.H.A., the 380th and 381st Brigades, and three batteries of the 47th Brigade R.F.A. (61 guns).

Under the 39th Divn (C.R.A., Br.-General W. G. Thompson) were the 46th, 174th and 186th Brigades, and one battery of the 282nd Brigade R.F.A. (53 guns).

Under the 16th Divn (C.R.A., Br.-General C. E. C. G. Charlton) were the 177th, 180th and 277th Brigades R.F.A. (60 guns).

Under the 1st Cavalry Division was Y Battery R.H.A. (6 guns).

on this day were not confined to his right. His left flank rested on the Somme near Bray, whilst the right of his neighbour, the Third Army, was six miles lower down the river at Sailly le Sec, and the crossings in this stretch at Chipilly—Cérisy and Sailly Lorette were only weakly held by hastily organized detachments sent up during the previous night,¹ reinforced about 10 A.M. by eight guns of the Canadian Motor Machine-Gun Corps. The bridges had not been blown up. As the events which influenced the movements of the XIX. Corps occurred on the left flank, its operations will be described from north to south.

The front of the 16th Divn (Major-General Sir C. P. A. Hull)² nearest the Somme was broken back in echelon, the 47th Bde (Br.-General H. G. Gregorie) covering Proyart, on the right of the main line, on the edge of the great Santerre plateau, while the 48th and 49th Bdes, next to it, lay to its left rear, behind one of the many spurs, buttresses of the plateau, which project towards the Somme. Enemy troops (*Guard Ersatz Division*) were seen forming up about 7 A.M., and an hour later they advanced against Proyart. Their frontal attack was repulsed; but, reinforced by infantry brought up in motor lorries, so an aviator reported, they worked round the left flank of the 47th Bde in the gap in the 16th Divn front, and about 10 A.M. forced the brigade to retire, the greater part joining the 39th Divn. The 48th and 49th Bdes at this hour were attacked in front by the *4th Guard Division*, and subjected to continuous artillery and machine-gun fire from the north bank of the Somme. They nevertheless maintained their position until 2.30 P.M., when, both flanks being turned, the two brigadiers (Br.-Generals F. W. Ramsay and P. Leveson-Gower), after consultation, ordered a retirement of some two miles to the spur west of Morcourt, and Cérisy was abandoned. Orders did not, however, reach the three battalions on the right, and these held on.

The withdrawal of the 47th Bde from Proyart had serious results. By 11 A.M., the enemy, pressing on, actually came in behind the left of the 39th Divn (Major-General E. Feetham). A small defensive flank was formed, but, about midday, the 118th and 117th Bdes (Br.-Generals E. H. C. P. Bellingham and G. A. Armytage), which were in the line, had to swing back and form a flank north-westwards

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 505.

² Up to 24th March, the 16th Divn had lost, including missing who subsequently returned, 208 officers and 5,340 other ranks.

towards Morcourt. The pioneers and the 116th Bde (in reserve) extended this flank so as to overlook the village, which is on the river, and the three field companies R.E. were brought up to dig a support line. To the right of the 39th, the 66th Divn (Major-General N. Malcolm) conformed to a slight extent to the withdrawal of its neighbour, but otherwise maintained its position, guarded on the left by Little's Composite Battalion (66th Divn¹), which was supported in the afternoon by a battalion of reinforcements some six hundred strong.

As soon as news of the loss of Proyart arrived at XIX. Corps headquarters, shortly before 11 A.M., Lieut.-General Watts called on the 8th Divn, the strongest formation in his command, to find troops for a counter-attack. This division had been attacked from 7.30 A.M. onwards, but after losing a small portion of its line had re-established its position, which it maintained intact for the rest of the day. Accordingly Major-General Heneker now sent forward one battalion (2/Devonshire of the 23rd Bde) and his pioneers (22/Durham L.I.), under Lieut.-Colonel A. H. Cope (2/Devonshire), from Rosières, still keeping his 25th Bde in reserve. To these two units as they moved north was added a composite battalion of the 50th Divn (Major-General H. C. Jackson), consisting of engineers and details of the 151st Bde. When, about 2 P.M., the three battalions topped the ridge north-east of Harbonnières and began crossing very open ground, intersected by old belts of wire, they came under machine-gun fire from Germans established in houses and old trenches where the Harbonnières—Proyart road crosses the Roman road (Amiens high road), a point marked at the time by a burning sugar factory. Nevertheless they moved steadily on, passed the thin line of the 39th Divn and, about 4 P.M., drove the enemy out of his holding at the cross-roads taking many prisoners.² Lieut.-Colonel Cope's battalions then established themselves between the 66th and 39th Divns just in time to repulse a German attack.

Meanwhile there had been trouble in the 50th Divn—now practically reduced to the 149th Bde (Br.-General E. P. Riddell)—which was holding four thousand yards of line between the 66th and the 8th Divns. The retirements north of it had led to a warning order for a

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 504.

² Lieut.-Colonel C. B. Morgan, commanding the 22/Durham L.I. at the age of 57, was mortally wounded.

withdrawal being issued, but this was misinterpreted by battalions in the line, which, about 1 P.M., began to fall back, abandoning Vauvillers near the junction with the 66th Divn. They were halted on the light railway which ran diagonally behind the position. The enemy was already taking advantage of the gap which had been left, consequently a counter-attack was organized from both flanks. On the right, the 8th Divn, which had at once formed a defensive flank, sent three battalions (2/East Lancashire, 1/Sherwood Foresters, 2/R. Berkshire and the reserve company of the 2/West Yorkshire), its three field companies and its three brigade headquarters, with all the local reserves Major-General Heneker could collect. On the left, the 7/Durham L.I. (Pioneers, 50th Divn) and the 22nd Entrenching Battalion, with some reserves of the 66th Divn, went forward. About 3 P.M. these troops, well supported by artillery, were under way, and struck the enemy, who was advancing in eight or ten waves. They drove the foremost waves back and re-established the 50th Divn line, recapturing Vauvillers. This success was only temporary, for the Germans attacked once more and, when the defenders' ammunition began to run short, broke in south of the village and enfiladed the line, causing another retirement. So by evening the counter-attacking troops and the 50th Divn were back again on the light railway east of Harbonnières.

The right of the 66th Divn also became involved in the retirement. Its two brigades in the line, though they could see that they had inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, had themselves suffered so severely in their exposed positions from machine-gun fire, that the three brigade headquarters had gone up to the left of the line to reinforce it.¹ The whole division now fell back on Harbonnières and, occupying some old French trenches, filled the space between the counter-attacking troops of the 8th Divn mentioned in the preceding paragraph and the 50th Divn. The former troops, about 2.30 A.M. on the 28th, were relieved by the 50th Divn, and returned to their former reserve position near Rosières.²

¹ From 27th March onwards until reorganization the infantry of the 66th Divn was so weak that brigades as such ceased to exist, and the three brigadiers took it in turn to command the infantry. One brigade-major, who was sent back to try and procure Lewis guns, was able to give Lieut.-General Watts at Villers Bretonneux an exact account of the situation, and to speak direct to the Army commander by telephone.

² The 2/Devonshire and 22/Durham L.I. of the 8th Divn remained until relieved by the 39th Divn at 5 A.M. on the 28th.

On the extreme right of the XIX. Corps the 24th Divn (Major-General A. C. Daly),¹ like the right of the 8th Divn, had been attacked about 7.30 A.M. Its left lost some trenches, but recovered them by counter-attack. Towards 10 A.M., its right, holding Rouvroy, was again attacked, and lost the village. Here also, about noon, the ground was recovered by a counter-attack, initiated by Br.-General R. W. Morgan (72nd Bde). By this time the XVIII. Corps had retired to the Arvillers—Folies line, so that the enemy was able to approach Rouvroy from the south as well as from the east, and by 2 P.M., owing to the defenders running short of bombs, he was again in possession of the village. The whole 24th Divn was now ordered back in order to keep touch with the XVIII. Corps on the Folies—Warvillers road, and established itself in some of the old French trenches; but, on the left, the 12/Sherwood Foresters (Pioneers) only wheeled back so as to keep connection with the 8th Divn, which alone of the troops of the XIX. Corps had maintained its morning position in front of Rosières. The others had not fallen back more than two thousand yards, owing largely to the splendid support of the field and heavy artillery: the former, indeed, remained in action until the enemy was within five or six hundred yards before changing position and thus successfully prevented the Germans from advancing any farther except on the left near the Somme.² To that quarter the narrative must now return.

The three battalions of the 48th and 49th Bdes from the left of the 16th Divn (the other three remained behind) attempted to retire to the spur west of Morcourt, but after passing through the village they were struck not only by artillery fire from the north bank of the Somme, but also by machine-gun fire from Cérisy, the next village farther down stream. It was thus evident that the enemy had gained possession of part of the ground south of the river which the 48th and 49th Bdes were to occupy.³ This

¹ Two batteries of the Canadian Motor Machine-Gun Corps were with it and did conspicuous good service.

² The heavy guns on the right remained in position until 4 A.M. on the 28th; but on the extreme left they had to be withdrawn about 11 A.M., three being left behind owing to the motor transport being put out of action by shell-fire.

³ The German *1st Division*, on the northern bank of the Somme, had ordered its *1st Grenadier Regt.*, which had spent the night near Morlancourt, and its *43rd Regt.* from divisional reserve in the Bois de Tailles, to cross to the south bank at Sailly Lorette and Sailly le Sec, respectively, places actually near or in the British line. The resistance offered by the 1st Cavalry Divi-

was confirmed by a G.S.O.2 of the XIX. Corps, who on the arrival at corps headquarters, at Villers Bretonneux, of air reports that the Germans were getting across the river in rear of the left, had been sent to reconnoitre in a motor car, driven backwards during the last stage. In consequence, the three battalions, whose retirement had been well supported by artillery, were turned to the south-west towards Lamotte on the Roman road, where they arrived about 5 P.M., preceded by stragglers, who, being without any officers, were collected by a staff officer of the 66th Divn. But when the village was shelled soon afterwards the battalions left it, covered by the 155th Field Company R.E., and were eventually put into trenches among Carey's Force to the west of the village. Their original retirement had been covered and the enemy's advance checked by the three (155th, 156th and 157th) divisional field companies R.E. and the 11/Hampshire (Pioneers), which had formed a defensive flank near Morcourt; also by a counter-attack, organized by Major-General Feetham, and delivered about 4 P.M. towards Cérisy by about 400 men of the 39th and 16th Divns under Captain G. Peirson, the brigade-major of the 48th Bde, and others. By about 5 P.M. this attack had reached the small wood 1,500 yards south-west of Cérisy, whence the exits of the village were commanded. Had Carey's Force been capable of counter-attacking, an advance near the Somme might now have had a good effect, but it was judged impossible to use this improvised force in the dark in such a way.

The three battalions of the 48th and 49th Bdes left behind near Proyart, repulsing all attacks, remained in position until 8 P.M. Then, reduced to about two hundred men, they escaped through the enemy lines by moving along the tow path of the Somme canal. An officer having learnt the German pass word, they were able to close with and dispose of the sentries and piquets whom they encountered. After a series of adventures, most of the party, moving by compass, reached the northern part of Carey's line.

sion proved too stiff for them to do so, and about 11.30 A.M. the 43rd was ordered to cross at Chipilly (opposite Cérisy). The canal there runs in the river channel, some thirty-five yards wide. The bridge had been partially blown up—only one end of the girders had dropped into the river—but the regiment was able to cross it under cover of artillery fire, with the help of planks, in spite of the determined resistance of some eighty men of the 16th Divn, and was in possession of Cérisy between 1 and 2 P.M., half an Army Troops Company R.E., sent from Carey's Force, failing to arrive in time to reinforce the defenders.

The counter-attack detachment under Captain Peirson which had reached the small wood near Cérisy was not able to proceed farther. It was almost immediately attacked under a barrage of machine-gun fire,¹ and driven back to the Roman road. The engineers and pioneers of the 16th Divn south of Morcourt, their left being turned, were also forced to retire. All the above troops then fell back to the line held by Carey's Force near the Roman road, whilst the remnants of the 16th Divn were eventually assembled, in support and reserve, behind Carey's left, between Hamel and Foulloy which lies west of Hamel. The Germans followed up from Cérisy, and, with little opposition, about 7 P.M. entered Lamotte, on the Roman road just in front of Carey's line. They also occupied the adjoining Warfusée Abancourt, entering that village whilst the 61st Divn headquarters were still in it. Although they did not attempt to advance farther, they were able during the night to interfere with the communication service, and to capture some small British parties moving along the high road. The German *4th Guard Division*, which had attacked the 16th Divn in front, had fortunately failed to follow up closely, being delayed by the stout conduct of the three battalions which had maintained their position east of Morcourt until 8 P.M. This enemy division halted for the night, however, in Morcourt and northwards, practically continuing the front line of the 39th Divn.

The crossing of the Germans at Cérisy was duly reported to General Fayolle, who was commanding all the troops engaged in the battle south of the Somme. As, however, he had made arrangements for French troops to relieve the XVIII. Corps, which was then to become reserve to the XIX., he seems to have assumed that the Fifth Army could deal with the situation. General Gough, at 5.30 P.M., gave orders for the 61st Divn, in reserve to the XVIII. Corps at le Quesnel, to be moved, less artillery, by lorry to Marcelcave (behind Carey's line, 2 miles south-west of Lamotte), and at 1.30 A.M. on the 28th, Major-General Mackenzie, its commander, reported at XIX. Corps headquarters, when he was given verbal orders to carry out a counter-attack at 5 A.M. in conjunction with the 1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens).² This latter formation had been ordered south of the river at 4.40 P.M. by

¹ The attack was made by a fourth battalion (of the *3rd Grenadiers*) of the *1st Division* which had been sent from the northern side of the river.

² As will be seen, the counter-attack took place later.

General Byng as soon as he heard of the difficulties in which the XIX. Corps had been involved by the passage of the Germans at Cérisy, a direct consequence of the unnecessary retirement of his own VII. Corps from Bray on the previous day.

The position of the 39th Divn was, however, far too desperate to await daylight. It was not only threatened from the east by the *Guard Ersatz Division*, and from the north by the *4th Guard Division*, but there were Germans of the *1st Division* on the west; behind it, in fact, between the divisional commander Major-General Feetham, back at Foulloy, and his infantry brigadiers and their troops astride the Roman road. At 11 P.M., therefore, the three brigadiers, having met on the Roman road, at a point due north of Harbonnières, drafted a message to the division stating that, unless orders were received to the contrary, they would extricate their brigades by withdrawing south-west to the line Harbonnières—Bayonvillers (2 miles north-west of the former) at 2 A.M. on the 28th. This message was carried by two officers who, by skirting Lamotte, got through and delivered it. It happened to cross an order from the division, received about midnight, directing the brigades to hold on, as a counter-attack against Lamotte was being organized.

About midnight, Major-Generals Heneker, Jackson and Malcolm, of the 8th, 50th and 66th Divns, met in conference at Cayeux (3½ miles south-west of Harbonnières). All three officers were of opinion that, unless Lamotte could be retaken and the situation on the left flank of the corps restored, the greater part of their divisions would be in danger of being cut off; and they reported their view to the XIX. Corps, Major-General Heneker speaking on the telephone. Lieut.-General Watts had, a few hours before, made much the same report to General Gough, but had been informed that, in accordance with General Foch's directions, there must be no voluntary withdrawal. It was evident that a rigid adherence to this decision would enable the enemy to achieve a breakthrough on a considerable scale and envelop a large part of the XIX. Corps. General Gough, therefore, appealed to General Foch. Roused from his bed at 3 A.M., the generalissimo consented to a swing back of the left of the XIX. Corps so that it might join on to the centre of Carey's Force. Accordingly, it was not until 4 A.M. on the 28th that Lieut.-General Watts could inform his divisional

commanders that a withdrawal had been sanctioned. For this movement, divisional orders had in the meantime been drawn up.

The formal corps orders for the retirement were issued at 4.45 A.M. Abandoning Rosières, the 8th Divn was to swing back to face north-east, pivoting on Vrély, in the centre of the left sector of the 24th Divn; the 50th, 66th and 39th were to carry on the line via Caix—Guillaucourt to Marcelcave, near the junction of the right and centre of Carey's line.

Owing to the existence of the great Montdidier pocket formed by the retirement of the French VI. Corps, this movement—which will be related in the account of the operations on the 28th—would leave the XVIII. Corps and the 24th Divn in a salient six miles wide; but it was hoped to improve the situation by counter-attacks on both flanks.

Considering the weak numbers and the exhaustion of the infantry, and the inadequate training of the majority of the regimental officers of the Fifth Army, the troops had exhibited remarkable powers of resistance on the 27th. Not only did they hold the enemy's advance with little loss of ground, but they also often counter-attacked with success. All were satisfied that they had inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and could, given secure flanks, hold their ground. The retirements were made at a slow walk, the Germans following at a few thousand yards' distance and coming to a halt when the British line lay down and faced them. They too were tired, and possibly hungrier; there was little artillery support for them, and without it the German infantry did not seem inclined to face fire.¹ They seemed, however, as ready as ever to take advantage of weak spots in the line, and the retirement of the right of the Third Army from Bray on the 26th had provided them with a priceless opportunity of this nature. To this retirement the difficulties which encompassed the Fifth Army on the 27th March may with justice be attributed.

In the midst of the preparations which were being made by General Gough, between 5 and 6 P.M., for the counter-attack against Lamotte by the 61st Divn and 1st Cavalry Division, the Military Secretary, Major-General H. G.

¹ Prisoners complained that their units were thrown straight into the battle at the end of long marches; that companies were given no objectives, but merely told to push on as far as possible; and that there was a breakdown in supply as the troops had outstripped their transport.

Ruggles-Brise, arrived at his headquarters. He came to inform him that it had been decided that he and his Staff required rest and that General Sir H. Rawlinson (at the moment British Military Representative at the Versailles Council) would arrive next day to supersede him. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, with the approval of the Government, had chosen to regard General Gough as responsible for the British retirement, which in their eyes was a grave disaster, and ordered his removal from command of the Fifth Army.¹

Pending a protest, which is mentioned later, the Commander-in-Chief, as usual, obeyed the orders given him, but he kept Sir H. Gough in France. Knowing the two generals and their General Staffs he felt certain that the difficult task of handing over in the midst of battle would be accomplished without a hitch. This proved to be the case, Gough's General Staff officers offering to stay on and serve under Rawlinson until the latter had picked up all the threads of the operations in hand.

North of the Somme

Map 2. Determined attacks were made throughout the day
Sketch 2. against the right and centre of the Third Army (General Hon. Sir Julian Byng), that is against all his corps except the XVII., by the right wing of the German *Second Army* (General von der Marwitz), and the left wing of the *Seventeenth Army* (General Otto von Below).² Losses were

¹ On this day Sir Henry Wilson told the Deputy C.I.G.S. (who entered Wilson's words in his diary) and other officers that "Hubert Gough has got to go because he had lost the confidence of his troops", and that orders were being issued to Sir Douglas Haig for his removal. As far as can be ascertained the proposal to remove General Gough at this moment was made by Sir H. Wilson, who did not want a strong man like General Sir H. Rawlinson as Military Representative at Versailles and was looking about for a post to which he might be transferred. The earliest official or semi-official mention of a proposal to remove General Gough appears in a letter from Lord Derby to Sir Douglas Haig, dated 5th March. In this the Secretary of State for War said: "I believe that the Prime Minister has also spoken to you on the subject, as he has heard reports from various sources with regard to Gough. He has also spoken to me!"

	Divisions		
	in 1st Line	in 2nd Line	in 3rd Line
<i>Second Army:</i>			
XIV. Corps (astride the Somme):	1st (2) (rest of the corps was south of Somme)	25th (1)	

heavy on both sides, but the enemy gained no advantage, except at four places : just north of Albert, where, on a two-mile front, a dent was made in the line ; north of Ablainzeville, where two brigades, whose position lay much lower than the enemy's, fell back to the line held by the third ; west of Serre, where a footing was secured in a front line trench by the enemy ; and at Rossignol Wood, which was lost.

The line of the Third Army, continuing that of Carey's Force—not that of the Fifth Army, whose left was six miles farther east—was held between Sailly le Sec on the Somme and Ribemont on the Ancre by the 1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens)¹ and Br.-General H. R. Cumming's Force (some two thousand infantry, formerly Hadow's Force, with additions). The rest of the VII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. N. Congreve) and the V. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe) carried on the line on the western bank of the Ancre up to Hamel, inclusive,

	Divisions					
	in 1st Line		in 2nd Line		in 3rd Line	
XXIII. Res. Corps :	13th (2), Res. (2)	9th	18th (1), Res. (1)	50th		
XIII. Corps :	3rd Marine (3), 54th Res. (2)		199th (3), Res. (1)	79th	228th (3), 27th (1)	
XXXIX. Res. Corps :	107th (1), Res. (1), Res. (1)	16th 21st	183rd (1)		2nd Bav.*	
<i>Seventeenth Army :</i>						
XIV. Res. Corps :	4th (2), Guard (1)	3rd	24th (3), 39th (2)		119th (1), 20th (1), 24th Res. (1)	
VI. Res. Corps :	5th Bav. (2), Bav.*	16th	195th (1), (1), 1st Guard Res. (2)	17th	53rd Res. (1), 111th (1)	
XVIII. Corps :	239th (3), 234th (1), 6th Bav. (2)		2nd Guard Res. (2), 221st (1)			
IX. Res. Corps :	26th Res.,* 236th (1)		26th (G.H.Q.)			
III. Bavarian Corps :	12th (G.H.Q.), (opposite Arras)	185th (1)	2nd Guard (G.H.Q.)			

A total of 19 in first line (of which 12 were fresh), 15 in second, and 8 in third.

(1) = In first line on 21st March.

(2) = „ second „ „ „

(3) = „ third „ „ „

* In general reserve, brought up after battle began.

(G.H.Q.) = In special G.H.Q. Reserve.

¹ Br.-General D. J. E. Beale-Browne was commanding the two brigades in the line.

but excluding the town of Albert which was in the enemy's possession.¹ The former corps had the 35th and 9th Divns in the line and the 21st Divn (less detachments) in reserve; but the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions² were arriving on the field, with orders to take over its front. The V. Corps had the 12th Division³ holding its long front, with the 63rd (Royal Naval) Divn, attached to the 12th, in support; the 2nd and 17th Divns were in reserve, and the 47th Divn was resting north-west of Acheux (7 miles north-west of Albert).

The front of the IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir G. M. Harper) extending from Hamel to Bucquoy presented a wide curved re-entrant, running along the high ground which surrounds a valley with Puisieux at its head. From Bucquoy northwards a short length of line faced east, leaving Ablainzevelle, which lies on the top of the ridge

¹ For a description of this area, see "1916" Vol. I., pp. 246-7. The Ancre is 20 to 30 feet wide and 3 or 4 feet deep; its valley bottom is 200 to 300 yards wide and marshy; the whole forms an obstacle practically impassable except at the bridges and by the causeways leading to them. As there was good observation on the valley, it proved a death-trap to the Germans.

² The 3rd Australian Division (Major-General Sir J. Monash), sent by rail (less its artillery, which marched) from the Second Army, had begun concentrating about Doullens and Mondicourt (16 miles south-west of Arras) on the 26th; its leading brigade (11th), starting at 3 A.M., was debussed near Franvillers (8 miles west of Ribemont) by 5 A.M. on the 27th. The 9th Brigade moved off in buses at 7.45 A.M. and the 10th at 8.45 A.M.

The 4th Australian Division (Major-General E. G. Sinclair-MacLagan), less artillery, also came from the Second Army, and arrived in the Basseux area (about 7 miles south-west of Arras) on the 25th; its 4th Brigade had relieved the 19th Divn at Hébuterne on the 26th, and filled the gap in the line at that place. The heads of the other two brigades, the 12th and 13th, reached Senlis and Forceville (about 8 and 5 miles north-west of Albert) on the morning of the 27th, by dint of marching most of the night, a distance varying from 17 to 19 miles. After concentration and breakfast, they proceeded on to the Dernancourt—Albert sector.

It should be remembered that the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand divisions had retained a strength of 12 infantry battalions when the Home formations had been reduced to 9.

Since the 1st November 1917 the name I. Anzac Corps had been changed to that of Australian Corps (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions, with the 4th in reserve); the II. Anzac Corps then became the XXII. and retained the New Zealand Division. As a matter of fixed policy the divisions of both the Canadian and Australian Corps had been kept together so as to form genuinely permanent corps; but, in view of the present emergency, the commanders, Lieut.-Generals Sir A. W. Currie and Sir W. R. Birdwood, had agreed to the use of the divisions separately as required.

³ This division, from the First Army, had entered the battle on the evening of the 25th; it had been ordered by General Byng on the 26th to hold the line of the Ancre from Albert to Hamel and allow the V. Corps to retire behind it; it was not placed under Lieut.-General Sir E. Fanshawe. This mistake was later remedied, but the V. Corps had not had time to re-assume command of the front.

commanding the ground to the north, in the enemy's hands. There had been severe fighting on the IV. Corps front on the 26th, when the enemy in a desperate effort to capture Bucquoy had pushed on almost to Hébuterne at the top of the re-entrant, actually reaching the cemetery and sending patrols through the village. The situation had been saved by the arrival of the leading troops of the New Zealand Division (Major-General Sir A. H. Russell) and the 4th Australian Brigade (Br.-General C. H. Brand). The line was now held by the New Zealand Division, the 4th Australian Brigade, with the 19th Divn behind it, and the 62nd and 42nd Divns,¹ with the 25th and 41st Divns in reserve and the 51st resting behind them.

The VI. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir J. A. L. Haldane) and XVII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson) carried on the front to the Scarpe, almost in a straight line west of the Cojeul valley, indented at Moyenneville and Boiry Becquerelle by the Germans having captured these villages. The VI. Corps had the 31st, Guards and 3rd Divisions² in the front line, but its 40th Divn had been pulled out to rest nine miles behind the line, while the 32nd Division, from the left of the Second Army, it was hoped, would soon be coming to support the corps.³ The XVII. Corps, which had hardly been attacked, had both its divisions, the 15th and 4th, in the line. The 3rd and 15th Divisions were still holding the rear portion of the original Battle Zone, not having been driven back, but swung back in order to keep touch with the rest of the Army which had been forced to give ground.

Thus, in all, the Third Army had 12 divisions, one brigade and one cavalry division in the line, six tired divisions in reserve, and three resting, but the entire divisional artillery was still in action and disposed on convenient slopes, with good observation; further there were three divisions on the way to reinforce this Army. Opposing it were ranged 42 German divisions, 19 in first line, 15 in second, and eight in third.

By this time a back line, known as the "Purple Line",

¹ The 42nd Divn had entered the battle on the 24th, and the 62nd on the 25th. Both came from the First Army.

² The 31st and Guards Divns (transferred from the G.H.Q. reserve with the First Army and the XVII. Corps respectively) had entered the battle on the night of the 22nd/23rd.

³ It came from the left of the line in the Ypres area, where the Belgian Army relieved it on this day. It moved by rail on the 26th and 28th to an area 7 miles west of Arras.

had been organized: it passed close behind Hébuterne, but diverged from the existing front line on either side of that village, so that at Forceville (west of Hamel on the Ancre) it was 7,000 yards and in the north, near Arras, 4,000 yards in rear of the front line. Behind it, other systems were being constructed under the superintendence of the Engineer-in-Chief (Major-General Sir G. M. Heath) and of the Chief Engineer of the Third Army (Major-General W. A. Liddell). These lines extended not only behind the Third Army, but along the whole length of the British front north of the Somme. The principal positions were: (a) one which started in front of Amiens, passed by the back of Arras, behind Béthune, well in front of Lillers to Cassel and northwards; (b) another which started 7 miles in rear of Amiens and soon after turned north-west to St. Omer and Watten; and (c) the old B.C.D. Line, which joined on to the Dunkirk defences, covering Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk. Connecting them were numerous switches and subsidiary lines, which were being developed as time and labour allowed.¹

Map 2.
Sketch 5.

On the greater part of the Third Army line the German attack began about 7.30 A.M., although on the extreme right, on the Sailly le Sec—Ribemont front between the Somme and the Ancre, held by the 1st Cavalry Division, it was not until 9.30 A.M. that the enemy made a move.² But in this sector he was easily kept at a distance. Strong detachments of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade had been pushed forward by Br.-General Beale-Browne as early as 6 A.M. These formed a line about a couple of thousand yards ahead of the Sailly le Sec—Ribemont front, and later Sailly Lorette was occupied. About 11 A.M. the 11th Australian Brigade relieved Cumming's Force of 21st Divn infantry, and in the course of the morning it was reinforced by the 10th Australian Brigade. Towards 1 P.M. Major-General Monash (3rd Australian Division) arrived and took over command of the Sailly le Sec—Ribemont sector from Major-General Mullens. His first precaution was to protect his left; for enemy pressure seemed heavy in the north, and there were rumours, which proved false, that Germans had crossed at Dernancourt. Later he found that his right seemed to be threatened: from 11 A.M. onward reports came in from the cavalry posts that they could see Germans trying to

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., pp. 394-5.

² The 1st Division only; it had a 3-mile sector to cover. The 25th Division, which was in support, had been relieved on the 25th on account of heavy losses, and rested on the 26th and 27th.

cross at Chipilly, one at 3 P.M., saying that the enemy had repaired the bridge at that place and had occupied C  risy.¹

At 11.30 A.M. Sailly Lorette had begun to receive fire from north and north-east: it was later attacked from north, east and south, but the cavalry garrison (four squadrons of the 4th and 5th Dragoon Guards) held on to the western edge and was not to be dislodged from the village. Whilst this fight was in progress, orders were received, as mentioned earlier, for the 1st Cavalry Division to go to the assistance of the XIX. Corps south of the Somme. At 5.30 P.M., under cover of a counter-attack which cleared Sailly Lorette, the garrison was relieved by the 3rd Australian Division; the other cavalry posts were also withdrawn, and, mounted, they crossed the Somme to join the rest of the division. The action of the 1st Cavalry Division on this day is a good illustration of the power of cavalry acting as mounted infantry to disengage from a combat and move rapidly from one threatened point to another.

By order of Lieut.-General Congreve, who feared that the enemy might endanger his right flank by pushing down the Somme valley, the 3rd Australian Division, now established in the Sailly le Sec—Ribemont line, formed a defensive flank along the north bank of the river. Major-General Monash, however, had already warned his 11th Brigade, which now extended back to a point one mile and a quarter west of Corbie. No suggestion had been made to Major-General Monash that he might push ahead and so cut off the enemy who had crossed at C  risy, thereby recovering the Bray line abandoned on the previous day. The Germans, who in point of fact consisted of only four battalions of the *1st Division*, did not follow up when the cavalry line was withdrawn, but dug in some fifteen hundred yards from the Australian front.

Farther north, the Germans, using five divisions in front line, attempted to enlarge the bridgeheads on the Ancre which they had gained at Albert and Aveluy, and to cross the river south of them at Dernancourt and north of them near Authuille and Hamel: desperate attempts were many times repeated. Under heavy bombardment Dernancourt was twice evacuated by the 9th Divn; but in this sector the enemy achieved no other success to compensate for his

¹ See page 23, f.n. 3.

heavy losses from the artillery and machine-gun fire of the 35th, 9th and 12th Divns. It was not found necessary to employ for counter-attack the local reserves, which included the 52nd Bde of the 17th Divn and the 12th Australian Brigade (Br.-General J. Gellibrand) of the 4th Australian Division; the latter, hurriedly sent up, was, however, rushed into close support above Dernancourt in face of severe bombardment.

Map 2. Arrangements had been made by the V. Corps to retake
Sketch 2. Albert by counter-attack, and at 7.30 A.M. the 190th Bde (Br.-General A. R. H. Hutchison), receiving good artillery support, advanced against the town from the north-west. Before much progress had been made the German *54th Reserve Division* was seen pushing forward between the northern suburbs of Albert and Aveluy, whilst simultaneously the *3rd Marine Division* tried to break out of Albert. Opposed by such numbers, both the 35th Bde (Br.-General B. Vincent), in the line facing Albert, and the 190th Bde were driven back soon after 10 A.M. Later the Germans secured a footing in Aveluy Wood in the 36th Bde sector (Br.-General C. S. Owen). The situation remained critical for some time, as small-arms ammunition began to run short in the front line; but in the end part of the lost ground was recovered and a new line secured.¹ Further efforts were made by the enemy to advance at 1 P.M. and 5 P.M.; but both the 17th Divn (Major-General P. R. Robertson) and the 190th Bde were brought up, and his attacks were held. It was judged, however, that in their tired state these reinforcements were inadequate to counter-attack and drive the enemy out of what remained of his small gains, and accordingly the fighting was allowed to die down soon after 8 P.M.

All efforts of the enemy to cross in the Hamel sector (37th Bde, Br.-General A. B. Incedon-Webber) failed, although the village itself, a shell trap situated on a forward slope, was evacuated, which, as in the case of Dernancourt, occasioned a temporary scare that the enemy had captured it and was pushing south, thereby causing the retirement of a number of men. Thus for a time confusion was added to the difficulties of the commanders in the Aveluy sector. But the day closed satisfactorily with the British still in possession of the high ground which gave observation over

¹ In the counter-attack Lieut.-Colonel J. S. Collings-Wells, D.S.O., of the Bedfordshire (190th Bde) was killed. For his services throughout the retreat a posthumous V.C. was awarded to him.

the Ancre valley, although Hamel and the low ground near the river had been abandoned to the enemy.

After dark, the 12th Australian Brigade relieved the 9th Divn in the sector between Dernancourt and Albert, and the latter went into reserve. The relief of the 35th Bde (12th Divn) in front of Albert, after no great time in the line, was completed in the course of the night by two brigades of the 17th Divn, whilst the 5th and 6th Bdes of the 2nd Divn relieved the 188th and 189th Bdes (Br.-Generals J. S. F. D. Coleridge and H. D. De Pree) of the 68rd Divn, resting in the northern part of Aveluy Wood. It was 7 A.M. on the 28th before all these operations were completed, but the night passed quietly on the front of the VII. and V. Corps. The enemy gave unmistakable symptoms of being as tired as the hard-pressed defenders, and was possibly much depressed by reason of heavy losses and failure to break through.

Against the great re-entrant held by the IV. Corps the Germans made persistent efforts all day, commencing at dawn. Perhaps fortunately for the British, the boundary line between the German *Second* and *Seventeenth Armies* passed down the centre of the re-entrant, so the enemy's efforts were not well combined. The most serious assaults were delivered against the New Zealand Division¹ in the southern half. Up to noon all enemy advances were broken up, mainly by artillery fire; the earlier attempts were made in the mist and supported by machine-gun fire at two hundred yards' range; later attacks were carried out by larger forces and covered by artillery fire, for which there was excellent observation over the foreground from the enemy's line on the heights. A most determined attack, after heavy shell-fire, was made on Bucquoy held by the 62nd Divn; but the British machine gunners, popping up out of shell holes, shot down the bulk of the Germans, while an artillery barrage, dropping "like a blanket", finished off the survivors. For two hours the German artillery continued to pour more heavy shell-fire into the village, without, however, dislodging the 62nd Divn.

As the enemy's rearward echelons closed up and more of his artillery arrived on the scene further attacks were delivered. Definitely marked assaults were made on the New Zealanders and on the 4th Australian Brigade north

¹ It was supported by the 2nd Divn artillery, its own not arriving until 4.30 P.M.

of them, at 12.30 P.M., 1 P.M., 3.30 P.M. and 7 P.M., but the fighting was really continuous. There were rumours about 5 P.M. that the enemy had broken through between the New Zealanders and the Australians, and also near Ayette in the 31st Divn sector; Major-General Solly-Flood (42nd Divn) consequently ordered his reserve brigade to be ready to form a defensive flank. In the end, however, the Germans were repulsed all along the line, and the remnants of the attackers withdrew by crawling down the slope. Only in a last effort did the enemy manage to make a small lodgment on a half-battalion front opposite Serre, where a counter-attack failed to dislodge him. The divisional artillery was then turned on to the sector and he came no farther.

On the northern side of the Hébuterne re-entrant enemy attacks were also continued in the afternoon, particularly from 12.30 P.M. onwards near Rossignol Wood and at Bucquoy, and again from 3 P.M. onwards near Ablainzeville, in the sector of the 62nd Divn. At the first-named spot, helped by a network of old trenches and supported by concentrated fire of field guns and trench-mortars, as well as by low-flying aeroplanes, the enemy closed to bombing distance, and soon after 5 P.M. the garrison of the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I. (187th Bde),¹ which had run short of bombs, was driven out of the wood.¹ Two motor machine-gun batteries now assisted in preventing the German success from spreading westwards. An order was sent by Major-General Braithwaite for the 4th Australian Brigade to block any progress on the right, and for the 187th Bde to counter-attack. The Australians carried out their part, but the order failed to reach the battalions of the 187th Bde. By 8.30 P.M., as the brigade had not moved, Br.-General J. L. G. Burnett (186th Bde, next on the left), called upon four tanks which were at the disposal of the 62nd Divn, and sent forward the 5/K.O.Y.L.I. (187th Bde), then in support, on the north-east side of Rossignol Wood with two tanks on each flank. The wood was found empty, for the mere sight of the tanks had caused the enemy to evacuate it; but owing to a misunderstanding the Yorkshiremen returned and did not occupy the wood, alongside which two tanks remained derelict, having broken down. The 187th Bde was then ordered to re-establish its line, but the

¹ Unfortunately some of the bombs sent up turned out to be "instructional", painted white and without charges.

movement was not made until 4.15 A.M. on the 28th. In the meantime the Germans had occupied the two derelict tanks as strongpoints, and all efforts to dislodge them failed. Moreover, by the skilful use of old trenches as ways of approach, they surprised and captured three companies of the 5/K.O.Y.L.I. and one of the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I.¹

Against Bucquoy, and opposite Ablainzevelle north of it, the enemy attacks at 4 P.M. and 5.30 P.M. failed. Thus in the IV. Corps sector the Germans had only two small lodgments and some two hundred prisoners to show in return for the day's very heavy casualties.

Northward again, in the VI. Corps sector, as in that of the IV. Corps, the first enemy advances were held off by artillery alone. But soon after 11 A.M., infantry being dribbled forward instead of advancing in line, a continuous frontal attack was maintained against the right of the corps, where stood the 31st Divn, already raked by fire from Ablainzevelle on the south. Towards 5 P.M., after more than five hours' fighting, in which the line swayed to and fro while bomb and bayonet were frequently used, the Germans established themselves in strength on both flanks, and then launched a heavy attack against the centre. Evening mist now began to form and prevented visual signalling, the last means of communication. Having received an authority for such action in case of emergency, the senior battalion commander of the 92nd Bde, after informing the 93rd, ordered a retirement. The two brigades then fell back steadily, though for the first five hundred yards under fire, through the third brigade of the division established in good trenches two thousand yards in rear; this was the 4th Guards, whose commander, Br.-General Lord Ardee, was wounded.² An assembly of the enemy (estimated at two battalions) on an aerodrome, no doubt with a view to following up the retirement, was detected and completely broken up by the divisional artillery fire, the survivors taking to flight. After this the fighting ceased: nothing was required but to fill gaps in the line, and this was done under Lieut.-General

¹ Lieut.-Colonel O. C. S. Watson, 5/K.O.Y.L.I., who led his small battalion reserve to extricate the companies, was killed whilst covering the retirement. He was posthumously awarded the V.C.

² The 15/West Yorkshire of the 93rd Bde brought 4 officers and 40 other ranks out of action.

Haldane's orders. The Guards Division extended southwards so that it covered seven thousand yards, and the remaining two battalions of the 93rd Bde were brought up again on the left of the 31st Divn. To aid the Guards Division in holding its long front, Lieut.-General Haldane allotted to Major-General Feilding the 97th Brigade (Br.-General J. R. M. Minshull-Ford), the leading portion of the 32nd Division, placed at his disposal by General Byng. It reached Hendecourt behind the divisional front between 3 and 4 A.M. on the 28th, and soon after went into the line.

On the left wing of the VI. Corps and on the XVII. Corps front there was only some artillery fire; but indications were not wanting that an attack was imminent astride the Scarpe, to the likelihood of which the G.H.Q. Intelligence summary had called attention on the 24th, thus correctly appreciating the German plans.¹ Harassing fire was therefore kept up at night.

During the night of the 26th/27th the Royal Flying Corps had dropped 28 tons of bombs, mostly on Bapaume, Péronne, Albert, Cambrai, Valenciennes station, and villages occupied by the enemy. On the 27th, the main flying work was directed against ground targets, the greater part of them being in the Somme area, where a further 22 tons of bombs were dropped and 313,345 rounds fired from aircraft. German regimental histories indicate that more damage was done to columns marching on the roads than to those halted in villages or concentrating; considerable losses are admitted. There was little air fighting as the enemy had also deserted the upper air to seek ground targets, and most of his heavy attacks were assisted by low-flying aircraft.

The reports sent during the day to G.H.Q. from the Fifth and Third Armies had been generally reassuring, except as regards the left of the Fifth Army, now threatened by the passage of the Germans at Cérisy from the north to the south bank of the Somme, although in what strength could not be ascertained. This caused Sir Douglas Haig once more to request General Foch to hasten the despatch of reinforcements to the Fifth Army.

The 27th had been a soldiers' battle mainly directed by the infantry brigadiers. No operation orders were issued by G.H.Q. or by the Fifth and Third Armies, except that at 3.45 P.M. Carey's Force was placed by General

¹ The "Mars" attack of the 28th March.

Gough at the disposal of the XIX. Corps, and at 11.13 A.M. General Byng repeated an order of the previous day, by which it was to be distinctly understood that no retirement from present positions was permissible; while at midday he reminded corps commanders that it was "undesirable" constantly to withdraw corps headquarters. The effect "on the troops is not good".¹

Similarly, no operation orders were issued by the higher French commanders. General Fayolle could do no more than hand over to General Humbert (Third Army) the 36th and 70th Divisions (XXXV. Corps), then on their way to the junction of the Allied Armies, and request General Foch to send him a division from the neighbouring Sixth Army, the 162nd Division, as already mentioned, being despatched towards Montdidier by lorry. The points of detrainment of the 12th and 127th Divisions, on their way to the First Army, were placed further back.

General Foch, however, addressed a letter of encouragement to General Pétain, beginning "Not a yard more of French soil must be lost", and making the suggestion, which was acted upon, that an "Order of the Day" should be sent to his troops calling on them for a supreme effort.² At 6.20 P.M. General Pétain issued the following Instruction:

"The General-in-Chief directs that the massif of Boulogne la Grasse³ and eastwards and the environs of Montdidier shall be firmly held in order to cover the detrainment of troops farther to the south.

"At all costs, the First Army will ensure that possession is retained of the Avre valley from behind Montdidier to Moreuil, without losing contact on the right with the Third Army."

General Pétain also issued a note, entitled "Plan of Operations",⁴ in which he forecast the constitution south of Beauvais (35 miles S.S.W. of Amiens) of a mass of manœuvre destined for a counter-offensive either in the direction of Amiens or of Péronne. This mass of manœuvre was to be formed by the Fifth Army from Champagne and the Tenth from Italy. Meantime, Fayolle's Group of Armies of the Reserve was given two missions:

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 510, where it will be found that on the previous day the Third Army itself ordered corps headquarters to come back.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 341.

³ A wooded ridge, running south-west to north-east, lying about seven miles south-east of Montdidier.

⁴ F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 342-4.

(1) To contain the enemy on the position held, with the right supported on the Oise, whilst the left keeps contact with the British forces.

(2) If the enemy succeeds in breaking through to Amiens and separating the French Armies from the British, to pivot on its right and at all costs hold on to the hilly and wooded area between the Divette and the Matz.¹

In order to obtain elbow room and delay such a movement, and to disengage, the G.A.R. will launch a counter-attack as soon as possible against the left flank of the enemy starting from the area east of Maignelay [8 miles S.S.W. of Montdidier]. Its left will be echeloned so as to guard against any attempt at envelopment from the west from the line Moreuil—Conty—Grandvilliers [the latter two places are respectively 17 miles east and 27 miles west by south of Moreuil].

General Fayolle transmitted directions in accordance with the above to his Army commanders, adding that “the mission of the British Fifth Army is to continue covering Amiens under conditions already arranged. The [French] Third Army will have the troops of the British III. Corps assembled as soon as possible and sent to rejoin the [British] Fifth Army.”

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 27TH MARCH²

Sketch 3. According to O.H.L. orders issued on the 26th,³ the *Seventh*, the *Eighteenth* and the *Second Armies* were to form a great barrier facing roughly south-west, to keep off the French. The line of the Oise to Noyon was allotted to the *Seventh Army*, that along the Avre as far as Moreuil to the *Eighteenth Army*, and thence, including Amiens, to Airaines (17 miles W.N.W. of Amiens), to the *Second Army*. The *Seventeenth* and *Sixth Armies*, pressing north-westwards, were to settle with the British, and the *Fourth Army* with the Belgians.

The progress made on the 27th was most unsatisfactory. Indeed, some Germans at the time regarded the day as “the turning-point in the great offensive”.⁴ The right of the *Eighteenth Army* alone pushed on, owing to the weak resistance offered by the newly arrived French troops near the junction with the British in front

¹ This area lies south of Lassigny, 12 to 20 miles south-east of Montdidier.

² This, and similar Notes on other days, is mainly taken from Rupprecht ii., Kuhl, Goes, Schwarte iii., Foerster, Ludendorff, and *Militär Wochenblatt*, March 1928.

³ “1918” Vol. I., pp. 536-7.

⁴ Rupprecht ii., p. 360, f.n. 1.

of Montdidier.¹ The *Second*, on whose advance the operation mainly depended, made no progress against the British, now reinforced by the Australians and New Zealanders; it attacked under the impression that it had only weak rear guards in front of it, and it is not claimed that it made more than "slight progress". The success of a few battalions of the *1st Division* in the Somme valley hardly receives mention in the German accounts. The *Seventeenth Army* met with unexpected resistance and could not gain ground. This Army, it is stated, was already in some disorder, and, "having" to reorganize and close up, its three left corps could not move to "the attack before midday".² When, "on this fateful day", Crown Prince Rupprecht found that the *Seventeenth Army* was not progressing, and that the right of the *Second* had not advanced sufficiently on the previous day to help it with flanking fire, he called on O.H.L. to send to the right wing of the *Seventeenth Army* three divisions which it had available. Between 2 and 3 P.M. he learnt that this request was refused, and, "in consternation", he cried, "then we have lost the War".³ The attack of the *Seventeenth Army* was then temporarily stopped until the "Mars" attack against Arras, which was to take place next day, had improved the situation,⁴ whilst the other Armies were told to continue the general offensive. The "Mars" attack, after three hours' bombardment, was to be launched at 7.30 A.M. on the 28th; "Valkyrie", farther north, between Lens and the La Bassée canal, was to follow on the next day, whilst preparations, but only on a limited scale, for the "George" attack, now called "Georgette"—but best known as "the Lys offensive of the 9th April"—were to be carried on by the *Sixth* and *Fourth Armies*.

¹ General Wetzell (M.W.B., 25 July 1935) regards "the failure of" O.H.L. to recognize at once and exploit fully the gap made in the French "front at Montdidier as one of the principal causes of the ill-success of the "great offensive".

² Rupprecht ii., p. 359.

³ Rupprecht ii., p. 359. Ludendorff proposed to use these divisions on the left wing of the *Eighteenth Army*, with others already massed there, to carry the attacks forward from Chauny—Noyon to Fontenoy—Compiègne. Schwarte iii., p. 411.

⁴ Kuhl, p. 136.

CHAPTER III

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*continued*)

28TH MARCH 1918

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

(Maps 3, 4 ; Sketches 6, 7, 8, 9)

SYMPTOMS of the slowing up of the German offensive clearly manifest on the 27th March grew more marked on the 28th. The great effort bearing the code name of "Mars", and called by us "First Battle of Arras 1918", made with a view to breaking through on both sides of the Scarpe in front of Arras at the junction of the Third and First Armies, and to giving a new impulse to the waning offensive power of the *Second* and *Seventeenth Armies*, failed to accomplish more than a slight gain of ground. The attacks against the rest of the front of the Third Army were entirely unsuccessful. It was only south of the Somme, at the junction of the Allied Armies, which was still a weak spot owing to the exhaustion of the Fifth Army and the unavoidably slow arrival of French reinforcements, that the situation gave any cause for alarm.

The weather which hitherto had been fine, though cold, with morning mist, became overcast during the night of the 27th/28th, and in the following afternoon turned to rain, which was not without effect in helping to quench the spirit of the attackers and impede their movements.¹

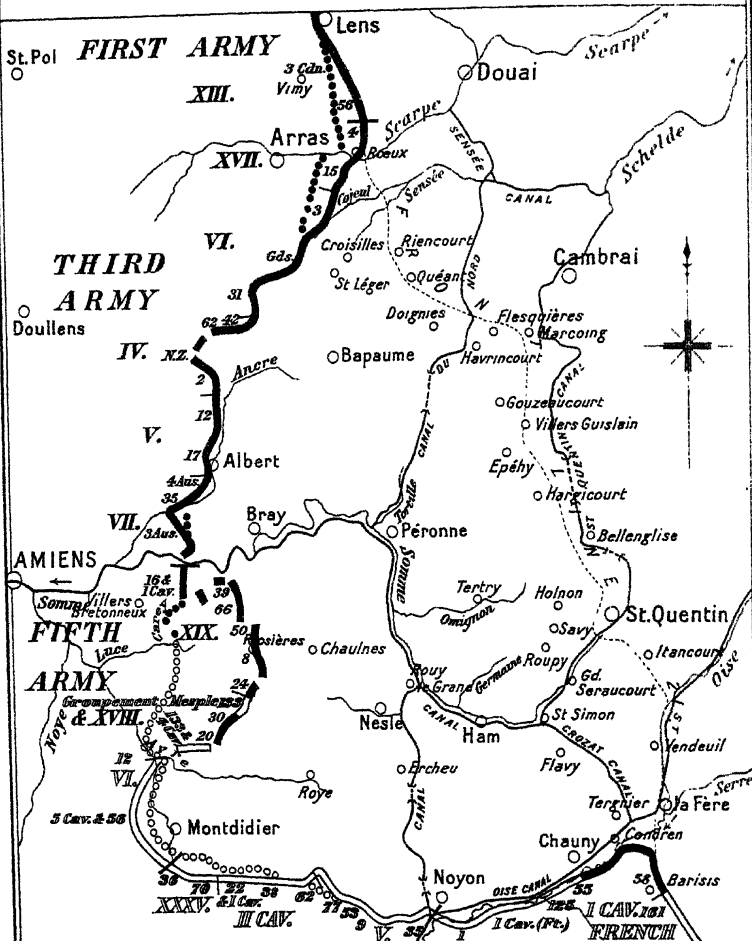
South of the Somme (Fayolle's Group : French Third and First Armies and British Fifth Army).

Map 3. The left wing (three corps) of Hutier's *Eighteenth Army*
Sketch 6. was already in possession of the line Noyon—Montdidier

¹ German accounts say "heavy rain", British "misty thin rain".

Sketch B.

28TH MARCH.



REFERENCE.

Line 28th March. British, French 29th March a.m. British, French
 Army boundaries Corps boundaries.

SCALE.

Miles 10 0 10 20 Miles.

Prepared in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

which it had been directed to reach, there to halt, reorganize and await further orders. Its only remaining task was for its right wing (two corps) to wheel forward to the line of the Avre from near Montdidier down to Moreuil.¹ The attack of this wing, assisted on the right by a corps and a half of the *Second Army*—a total of six divisions of which three were in first line—fell mainly on the French First Army, the connecting link between the Allied forces, which consisted of the very weak French VI. Corps (the 56th Division and 5th Cavalry Division, badly shaken by the fighting of the previous day, and the head of the arriving French 12th Division²) and the “Groupement Mesple” (part of the 133rd Division and a brigade of the 4th Cavalry Division).

The British Fifth Army, which was attacked by seven German divisions with four in support, now contained only the six battered divisions of the XIX. Corps, to which the 1st Cavalry Division and Carey's Force were attached, and the equally battered four divisions of the XVIII. Corps.

The French VI. Corps (General de Mitry) was far too weak to hold the pocket which its front round Montdidier now formed, while its reserves were not yet available, these being: the 166th Division, whose divisional artillery, with two battalions, had begun to detrain in the Noye valley (11 miles west of Montdidier) at 6 A.M.; and the 127th Division, which was not expected to detrain before evening. In the British Fifth Army, the only available reserve was the very weak 36th Divn of the XVIII. Corps, part of whose infantry was still in the line.

The situation around Montdidier appeared so grave that General Debeney (First Army) enquired of General Foch what he should do if the events of the day forced him to choose between keeping touch with the British Fifth Army or with the French Third Army. “To this question, General Foch replied that in such an eventuality, the First Army should maintain junction with the French Army.”³

The course of events turned out somewhat differently to what was anticipated. The Germans, attacking at 8 A.M., at first gained ground in the Montdidier pocket. But the French Third Army (nine divisions strong, of which four were fresh) was fortunately able to intervene, so that at 9 A.M. General Fayolle ordered its left, the

¹ Montdidier itself is on a branch of the Avre called Rivière des Trois Doms, which enters the Avre 5 miles below the town.

² Five battalions, two of which were Territorial. F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 352.

³ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 353.

XXXV. Corps (36th and 70th Divisions, both fresh), to counter-attack, the divisions on either flank joining in. He directed the 162nd Division, about to arrive, to move towards them as reserve. The movement of the 36th and 70th Divisions, in which the 22nd (II. Cavalry Corps), on the right, took part, began soon after midday, and was entirely successful, the German *10th Reserve* and *9th Divisions* being thrown back a couple of miles. The VI. Corps on the left, with portions of the 56th Division and the 5th Cavalry Division, then joined in and drove the enemy nearly the same distance back towards Montdidier. So surprised were the Germans that they made no effort to recover ground. Possibly this flank attack, if it had been persisted in and supported by the V. Corps farther east, might definitely have stayed enemy progress in this quarter.

On the right wing of the French Third Army front, opposite its V. Corps, the enemy was nearly quiescent. He captured Canny, but there was little change, as the French gained some ground west of the village.

To assist the VI. Corps, on the other flank, General Debeney ordered the artillery of the 12th and 166th Divisions and some heavy batteries to be deployed near Grivesnes (6 miles north-west of Montdidier), under protection of two battalions of the 166th Division and of the British 36th Divn, so as to flank any further German advance from Montdidier.¹ The British 2nd Cavalry Divn (Br.-General T. T. Pitman), to which the Canadian Cavalry Bde was attached, reached Lieuvillers (13 miles W.S.W. of Montdidier), on the way north to the Fifth Army, in the early morning. Having reported its presence in the area to General Humbert, it was directed to place itself under the VI. Corps, whereupon Br.-General Pitman sent on the Canadian Cavalry Bde. There was, however, no necessity to engage any of the division; but at night it formed three dismounted battalions of three hundred men each, to hold a second line behind the VI. Corps.

Map 3. Thus far, therefore, the G.A.R. had done more than
Sketch 7. merely hold its ground; but its extreme left, the Groupement Mesple, nearest the British, was not so fortunate.²

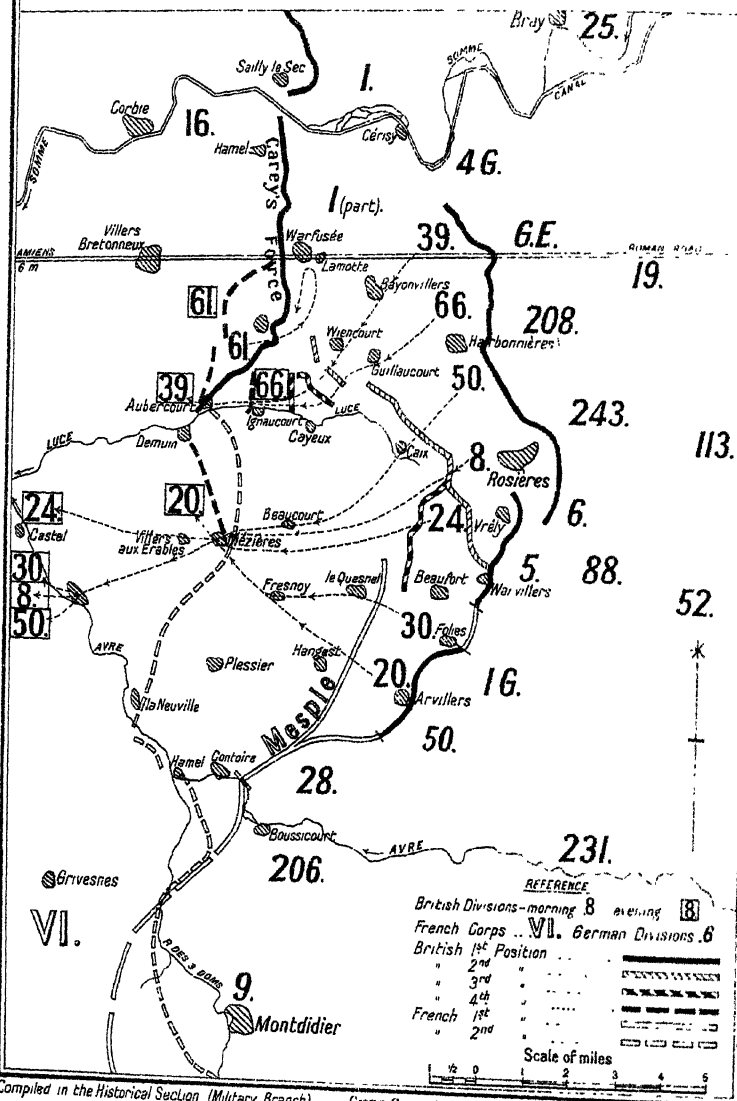
¹ By 5 P.M. the 107th and 109th Bdes had established a line of posts south of Grivesnes, covering the artillery on south and east.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 854-5, says very little about what happened to it. There is no more than: "... The First Army was less fortunate on its "left wing. In the afternoon towards 4.30 P.M. the Groupement Mesple

Sketch 7.

28TH MARCH

Between the Avre & Somme.



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3050/36

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It will be recalled that the Groupement Mesple should have relieved the remaining portion of the XVIII. Corps (20th and 30th Divns) during the night of the 27th/28th; but by dawn only a small part of the relief had taken place, so that Mesple's troops, as before, held the line from the Avre, near Contoire (1½ miles north-east of Pierrepont), to a mile S.S.W. of Arvillers; the latter village and sectors, two thousand yards long to the south and three thousand long to the north of it, were still occupied by a small detachment of the 36th Divn, the 60th Bde (20th Divn) and the 30th Divn. Beyond this, in the two thousand yards from Folies to the flank of the XIX. Corps, was a small portion of the French 133rd Division. The rest of the Groupement was on a line a couple of miles behind the British, from Hangest to Le Quesnel, with one battalion to the north at Caix.¹ An attempt had been made by General Humbert to make the division of command definite; by his orders, from midnight of the 27th/28th, the 30th and 36th Divns were placed under General Mesple, and the 20th and 61st Divns under the XIX. Corps, thus depriving Lieut.-General Maxse (XVIII. Corps) of any command, and increasing Lieut.-General Watts's responsibilities. From headquarters at St. Fuscien (3 miles south of Amiens, only 2 miles east of Fifth Army headquarters at Dury) the latter had now to command ten formations, with a slightly strengthened corps staff. The transfer ordered by General Humbert took effect in the course of the day's operations.

"lost Arvillers and Hangest; it was very strongly pressed and finally forced to withdraw its units rapidly towards the north. At 5.30 p.m. General Mesple came to the conclusion that he might be forced to recross to the left bank of the Avre. On receipt of the report in which the general expressed this intention, General Debeney despatched the following order to him: 'To cross to the left bank of the Avre is out of the question'. He further informed him that the artillery of the 166th Division and two groups of heavy artillery were being sent to his assistance; that he was at least to hold the line Pierrepont (at the junction of the Avre with R. des Trois Doms)—Plessier—Beaucourt—Cayeux (some four miles behind the XIX. Corps front), and he was to 'acquaint his British neighbour with this decision'."

General Debeney's operation orders for the 29th, issued at night [F.O.A. vi. (i.), Annexe 993], untimed, state that General Mesple was occupying this line. He actually had to retire more than a mile west of it.

¹ The whole of the field artillery of the XVIII. Corps (G.O.C., R.A. Br.-General D. J. M. Fasson) was under the French; that of the 36th Divn still with the V. Corps; that of the 20th and 30th Divns, in the sector now under description. Of the heavy artillery (Br.-General L. J. Chapman), all in action, the Southern Group was placed under the French 166th Division (near Grivesnes), and the Northern Group was behind the right of Groupement Mesple.

About 8.30 A.M. the enemy began a bombardment on the whole line between the Avre and the Somme ; at about 10 A.M. his infantry was advancing.¹ By this time the British artillery had been able to fix O.P.'s and to register, and therefore rendered a good account of itself. Unfortunately the French south of the XVIII. Corps troops gave way early.² Their retirement exposed the British flank, and about midday Arvillers was lost. General Mesple, who apparently considered the line Hangest—Le Quesnel, partly prepared by the divisional engineers of the XIX. Corps, as his main position, and that held by the British as an outpost line, sent only a few men forward to help them. When this view of the relief was realized, orders were given, with General Mesple's sanction, to the 36th Divn detachment, the 60th Bde and the 30th Divn to retire through the French. The movement was carried out about 2 P.M. under heavy fire, with, naturally, considerable loss. The 20th and 30th Divns then went into reserve; the former to the XIX. Corps, and the latter (less artillery) across the Avre to Rouvrel (3 miles west of Moreuil). The men of the 36th rejoined their divisional headquarters near Sourdon.³

Soon after 2 P.M. the Germans were advancing against the French position on the ridge Plessier—Hangest—Le Quesnel. The northern end of this line was secure, being some two thousand yards in rear of and overlapping the position of the XIX. Corps on the next ridge in front ; but on the south it was already turned by the enemy having broken through at Contoire and pushed on to Plessier. At 4.30 P.M. the Groupement Mesple began to retire to another position a thousand yards west, Fresnoy—Beaucourt—Cayeux (the line selected by General Debeney) ; but it did not remain there long, and fell back, another mile, to the line La Neuville (on the Avre)—Mézières—Aubercourt.⁴

¹ Three divisions : the 50th (from second line, but originally in first) against Contoire and northwards ; the 1st Guard (quite fresh from the third line) against Arvillers ; and the 5th (second line) against Folies. The 28th (which on the 26th had boldly pushed forward to Erches), opposite Contoire, was given a rest, part of the 50th Division being placed under its staff.

² Some troops of the 50th Division, it is claimed, were in Plessier, well behind the French front, soon after midday ("Regt. No. 109", p. 544), although the 50th Division, as a whole, was not abreast of the village until 4 P.M.

³ For the casualties see Chapter XXV, Note I.

⁴ It reported that its left was farther to the front, at Ignaucourt ; but only a French cossack post was found there.

The troubles of the XIX. Corps, with a force of Germans at Lamotte—Warfusée Abancourt, behind its left, were greatly augmented by the weakness of the French on its right. The consent of General Foch to the swinging back of the left wing had been received only in the early morning, after serious delays; the result was that the movement had to be carried out in daylight, in contact with the enemy, and the process entailed considerable losses.¹ So difficult did the direction of the operations at such short notice appear, that the brigade-majors and other officers were sent up to the front to instruct each unit commander personally when and how to withdraw and to what new positions. Some of these officers became casualties, and even orders, sent in triplicate, did not in all cases reach their destinations. The general result was that the troops of the 8th, 50th, 66th and 39th Divns, having no time to make an orderly retirement, were hustled back in some confusion, and Br.-General E. H. C. P. Bellingham (118th Bde), commanding the rear guard of the 39th Divn, and his brigade-major were captured. The left of the 50th Divn was surprised by an enemy party which approached unseen through a wood, so that Br.-General E. P. A. Riddell (149th Bde), commanding the infantry of the division, had to use his last reserve, the 22nd Entrenching Battalion, to counter-attack. The men were fortunately, in open order, actually having dinners, when called upon; their sudden appearance took the Germans aback, and they retired into Guillaucourt. In the midst of this turmoil the commander of the 25th Bde, Br.-General C. Coffin, V.C., was seen riding about to restore confidence and order, not without success, although about 11 A.M. Vrély, the left of the front of the 24th Divn, which was the pivot of the manœuvre, was lost. Warvillers, on its right, was still retained. In the end, however, the position reached about midday, Warvillers—in front of Caix—thence westward along the high ground south of Guillaucourt and Wiencourt, was slightly in rear of that ordered by Lieut.-General Watts.

The right of the new position, which ran south-east to north-west obliquely to the enemy's front, could not be held for long; for it was soon enfiladed both by artillery and machine-gun fire. Towards 1 P.M. the whole of the 24th Divn and the right brigade of the 8th, pivoting on the centre and left of the 8th, swung back to a wired trench extending

¹ The Germans numbered nearly 10 divisions: 88th, 6th, 243rd, 208th, Guard Ersatz, 4th Guard, 1st (part of), with three in reserve.

northward from about a mile east of Le Quesnel, in front of and overlapping the left of the Groupement Mesple. The front of the XIX. Corps now presented a slight salient towards the enemy, and, being well sited and safe from artillery enfilade, the German attacks were repulsed.

In the meantime, the counter-attack of the 61st Divn supported by the 1st Cavalry Division, ordered the previous night, and intended to recapture Lamotte and expel the Germans who had come in behind the left of the XIX. Corps, was at last taking place. The commanders (Br.-Generals A. H. Spooner and A. W. Pagan) of the two very weak brigades (183rd and 184th) detailed for this task had been given the choice of attacking at dawn or by daylight. As their men were very tired with seven days' continuous fighting, they preferred to take the risks of the latter alternative in order to afford them a rest. Actually at 5 A.M., the hour originally ordered for the attack, some of the troops had not arrived. Supported by 16 field and 18 medium guns, the infantry advanced at midday on Lamotte and Warfusée Abancourt from the railway line some two thousand five hundred yards to the south, the cavalry co-operating by pushing patrols out north of the villages. Although the ground was absolutely flat without a scrap of cover or a trench on it, they got within two hundred yards of the enemy. But no further progress could be made; at 3.40 P.M. the counter-attack was abandoned, and the 61st Divn fell back southwards on Marcelcave. Considering that, on the left, the Third Army was six miles in rear and that, on the right, the French had retired, the XIX. Corps could hardly have maintained its position even had the counter-attack been successful.

Soon after the counter-attack started the Groupement Mesple began to retire from the Plessier—Hangest—Le Quesnel line. Thus the right of the XIX. Corps, already partly uncovered, was now completely exposed.

Lieut.-General Watts had given instructions that if the divisions were forced to retire, they were to re-form not more than five hundred yards in rear of the line Mézières—Marcelcave, marked by two spurs between which flows the Luce.¹ Part of this line, Demuin to Marcelcave, was already

¹ The Luce is a small, water-cress, stream, 4 to 8 yards wide, and generally fordable. Like other rivers in this part of France, it has pools and swamps along its course. The valley bottom is flat, and there are trees, chiefly poplars, planted nearly all along it to a width of 200 or 300 yards.

held by Carey's Force,¹ and to garrison the remainder the 20th Divn (about a thousand organized infantry), transferred from the XVIII. to the XIX. Corps during the morning, was now sent.

The 24th and 8th Divns, which had been suffering heavily from fire, began to fall back on this position. Later, instructions were issued: to the 24th Divn to concentrate at Villers aux Erables, to protect the right flank; to the 8th Divn to go back for the same purpose to a line two miles east of Moreuil already reconnoitred; and to the 50th Divn to act as reserve to the 20th Divn. The retirement, in which six armoured cars of the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Corps did good service on the Amiens—Roye and Roman roads, and near Caix, between them, was begun soon after 4.30 P.M. in a squall of heavy rain which prevented enemy observation, a fortunate circumstance, as the ground was bare and open. Owing, however, to the brigade-major of the 23rd Bde being wounded, no orders reached the 2/West Yorkshire and 2/Middlesex, and by 5.30 P.M. the enemy had closed in and only small parties of these two battalions managed to escape. The 50th Divn held on in front of Caix until 6 P.M., when it withdrew as a rear guard, well supported by its artillery.

The 66th Divn, which in the course of the afternoon had been forced back a mile from its exposed position facing Guillaucourt and Wiencourt to another, half a mile in front of Ignaucourt, stood fast. The 39th Divn, which had some troops in the line north-west of the 66th Divn, facing east, made a gallant and successful counter-attack to stop the German advance, when the latter division was falling back, using the 116th and 118th Bdes, each formed into a weak composite battalion. These brigade-battalions, with the 117th, subsequently formed on the left of the French, then at Cayeux, so as to prevent the enemy from overlooking the Luce valley. Although he made several attempts to drive back the brigade-battalions of the 39th Divn, they maintained their position until 10.30 P.M., when all other troops, French and British, having retired, they began to withdraw by order to the right sector of Carey's line, Aubercourt—Marcelcave. This proved to be no easy matter, as the latter village had

¹ About 3000 technical troops (Army Troops companies, Tunnellers, Field Survey, Signals; 500 American railway engineers. See "1918" Vol. I., p. 507). A reinforcement of 400 of the 2nd Bn. Canadian Railway Troops arrived on this day.

meantime been lost. The 61st Divn, however, was holding a line west of it.

About 4 P.M. Carey's improvised force, with the help of the 1st Cavalry Bde and the artillery, engineers and infantry of the 16th Divn, had repelled a very strong attack on Hamel, on the left of its line. Two hours later, after the unsuccessful counter-attack on Lamotte, when the two brigades of the 61st Divn had retired to the railway cutting north of Marcelcave, covered by its third brigade, the Germans began a heavy bombardment of Marcelcave and followed this up with an infantry attack. Carey's Force, unable to face another fight, had already abandoned the village.¹ The 61st Divn, now threatened in rear and enfiladed along the railway, had also withdrawn and finally dug in half a mile west of Marcelcave, in touch on both flanks with Carey's Force. The 39th Divn on arrival took position on the right of the 61st Divn, and later the 66th Divn, as above mentioned, settled down slightly in front of the 39th around Ignaucourt, which should have been the left of the Groupement Mesple.

Under arrangements made with General Mesple, who was expecting reinforcements,² the 24th, 8th and 50th Divns, with the 30th, went into reserve in the valley of the Avre near Moreuil, which place was covered by a bridgehead held by the French. The retirement, obliquely to the front, led to serious congestion not only on the roads, most of which converge on Mézières, but on the ground bordering the roads, fortunately open and flat. There was no hurry or serious confusion, but a steady flow of British and French troops drifting westward at a slow pace. The 24th Divn was concentrated at Villers aux Erables, west of Mézières, by about 7.30 P.M.; it was then ordered by the XIX. Corps to occupy and complete the Mézières—Demuin line, but this was found to be already held by the French; so the division continued its march westwards across the Avre to the Bois de Sénecat, which was to become a well-known fighting centre, west of Castel (2 miles below Moreuil). The greater part of the 8th Divn was assembled

¹ So dangerous did the situation appear that Lieut.-General Watts fell in his last reserve, the corps signal company, less one operator left in the telephone exchange.

² He had been informed that the 163rd and 59th Divisions were on their way to him, the former by lorry and the latter by rail, and that their leading troops would become available early on the 29th; further, that portions of the 2nd, 3rd and 9th Cavalry Divisions were concentrating south of Amiens, and might also be expected. F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 359.

east of Moreuil during the evening, and then ordered to proceed a further six miles across the Avre to Jumel, which four battalions reached about midnight; the rest settled down in adjacent villages. The 50th Divn concentrated north-east of Moreuil about 11 P.M., but eventually, owing to the misunderstanding of an order which directed the transport to go west of the Avre, two brigades crossed the river and billeted in Merville and Louvrechy, three miles west of Moreuil.

There now remained in the front line of the XIX. Corps only the 66th, 39th and 61st Divns, with the 20th in close support of the left of the Groupement Mesple, and the 16th Divn and 1st Cavalry Division on the left of Carey's Force. As a result of the retirement, the salient held by the XIX. Corps had disappeared, and the feature of the Allied line south of the Somme was now a great re-entrant, with Montdidier at its apex. From this point the line ran eastwards, practically straight, to Noyon, and northwards, practically straight, to Sailly le Sec on the Somme. The junction of the Allied Armies near the Luce now coincided with the dividing line between the German *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies*, so that the French had the *Eighteenth*, and the British the *Second* and *Seventeenth* opposed to them. Sketches 6, 7.

General Rawlinson, who at 4.30 P.M. had officially taken over the command of the Fifth Army (now represented by the various formations under the XIX. Corps, as the III. Corps was still with the French, while the VII. Corps had been transferred to the Third Army and the XVIII. Corps broken up), thus expressed himself in a letter to General Foch, timed 6.30 P.M. : ¹

"The situation is serious, and unless fresh troops are sent here in the next two days, I doubt whether the remnants of the British XIX. Corps which now hold the line to the east of Villers Bretonneux can maintain their positions. The XVIII. Corps has been pulled out; a few of its troops which were not relieved by the French are being transferred to the command of the XIX. Corps.

¹ General Rawlinson's principal Staff officers were: M.G.G.S., Major-General A. A. Montgomery; D.A. and Q.M.G., Major-General H. C. Holman; G.O.C. R.A., Major-General C. E. D. Budworth; C.E., Major-General R. U. H. Buckland.

Earlier in the day General Rawlinson had rung up Lieut.-General Watts to enquire about the situation. The latter in a cheerful voice replied: "they may well get us by lunch-time and you by tea-time".

"I feel some anxiety for the security of Amiens, and draw your attention to the danger in which this place will be if the enemy renews his attacks from the east before fresh troops are available. I fear that the troops of the XIX. Corps are not capable of executing a counter-offensive. I am this night sending a staff officer to General Fayolle to bring up the remains of the British III. Corps by motor transport, and request the assistance of the British 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, which are now west of Montdidier.¹ I am in accord with General Byng as regards an offensive along the two banks of the Somme. For the moment, it is not feasible."

At 8.35 P.M. General Fayolle ordered the French Third and First Armies to continue their attacks "without respite night and day" in the general direction of Roye; the British Fifth Army was to cover Amiens at all costs. But in the First Army orders General Debeney watered down these instructions; he directed the Groupement Mesple merely to maintain its position with the help of the reinforcements and artillery sent to it: it was to be prepared to resume the offensive when the arrival of further reinforcements permitted: the VI. Corps was to clear the valley of the Rivière des Trois Doms (which runs through Montdidier), and follow the enemy should he show signs of retirement.

*North of the Somme (Third Army and XIII. Corps
of the First Army)*

Map 4. North of the Somme, a battle was fought which in some respects curiously resembled that of the 1st July 1916, and took place on nearly the same ground. But it was on a greater scale, 29 German divisions attacking (with 16 in support) on a 33-mile front, from the Somme to Arleux, as

¹ General Fayolle had informed General Pétain at 5 P.M. that the 2nd Cavalry Divn had been relieved and was marching via St. Just en Chaussée (11 miles south-west of Montdidier) to the Fifth Army; that the 14th Divn (less artillery), assembled near Estrées Saint Denis (16 miles south of Montdidier) would march that day southwards towards Pont Saint Maxence (25 miles south of Montdidier) with a view to rejoining the Fifth Army. Of the other formations of the III. Corps and cavalry, all in the French Sixth Army area, the 3rd Cavalry Divn was concentrated in the Forêt de Laigle (20 miles south-east of Montdidier), "ready to attack"; the 58th Division was on its old front, along the Oise, and the 18th Divn (less artillery) at Namcel (30 miles S.S.E. of Montdidier) reorganizing, but under orders to proceed by bus—it started next day—to Hebecourt (5 miles south of Amiens).

compared with 16 Allied divisions (with seven in support) on a 16-mile front, counting from the Somme right up to Gommecourt. The artillery bombardment in 1918 though shorter was far fiercer, with more and better gas shells. As on the 1st July, the attackers gained most ground on their right, where the principal effort was made with nine divisions (eight fresh to the battle), on a front of ten miles against four divisions in the so-called "Mars" attack, which was now added to the original "Michael I., II. and III." Except on the right, there was no progress whatever; some ground, indeed, was lost by the enemy to the 3rd Australian Division. The Germans came on time after time with the greatest bravery, sometimes almost shoulder to shoulder, assured that it required but one more effort to break the British front,¹ only to be held and repulsed by the combined fire of guns, machine guns and rifles. They suffered very severe losses, the total of which has never been divulged. Not bringing into the field a numerical superiority of three or four to one, such as they enjoyed over the Fifth Army on the 21st March, and not favoured by fog, they failed and the fighting was brought to an end in the afternoon, "partly by order of the commanders, partly by "the attitude of the troops themselves";² and it was not renewed.

In an almost static defensive battle of this kind, there is little to record except the severe casualties inflicted on the enemy. Success was the result of the stout resistance of the troops. No operation orders were issued by G.H.Q., and those of the Third and First Armies dealt with the moves of incoming and outgoing divisions.³

There was little fighting in the air on the 28th. Large

¹ Crown Prince Rupprecht (ii., p. 361) wrote in his diary in the morning : "We stand immediately before the success of the final break-through".

² Foerster, p. 286.

³ By the First Army at 8 P.M. : 56th Division to be relieved by the 4th Canadian on the night of 29th/30th March.

By the Third Army at 4.10 P.M. : the 9th Divn (less artillery) to be withdrawn ready for transfer to another Army, withdrawal to be completed by the night of the 29th/30th ; at 8.30 P.M. : the 21st Divn (less artillery) to be withdrawn by the night of the 30th/31st (this was cancelled at 11.20 A.M. on the 29th) ; at 9.15 P.M. : the reserve brigade (9th) of the 3rd Australian Division to be allotted the specific task of guarding the flank of the Third Army (there had been some thoughts of sending it south of the Somme to assist the XIX. Corps) ; at 11.20 P.M. : the 5th Australian Brigade (in Army reserve) to be transferred from in rear of the IV. Corps to in rear of the V. ; at 11.50 P.M. : the 63rd Divn (less artillery) to be withdrawn during the 29th (this also was cancelled at 11.20 A.M. on the 29th).

The evening orders issued by the Fifth Army are given later.

enemy formations were reported from time to time over the Third Army front, flying higher than they had been doing for some days, and only occasionally firing on the front line troops; they seemed to avoid combat whenever they could, but seven were shot down. The R.F.C. fighting and bombing squadrons were very busy until evening both on the Fifth and Third Armies fronts, operating against ground targets. Many infantry and other columns on the roads were machine-gunned and bombed. The losses (17 planes missing, 35 wrecked and 6 abandoned) were nearly all due to fire from the ground. The weather at night was too bad for bombing expeditions.

Map 4. Near the Somme, in the area of the VII. Corps (Lieut.-Sketch 6. General Sir W. N. Congreve), the enemy during the night of the 27th/28th occupied Dernancourt, evacuated the previous day owing to shell fire in favour of the salient formed by the railway, which curves round the foot of a hill west of the village. The new position gave excellent observation but was tactically weak. Reinforced by the *50th Reserve Division*, the Germans made half-hearted attempts at 5 A.M., and twice later in the day, against the line Marett Wood—Treux, held by a detachment of the 35th Divn east of the Ancre, covering Ribemont as a bridgehead.¹ The 12th Australian Brigade (Br.-General J. Gellibrand), holding the front from Dernancourt to the outskirts of Albert, was attacked even earlier, about a couple of hundred Germans appearing about 4.30 A.M. out of the mist and crossing the railway at a gap between two battalions. Infiltration failed here, as they were cut off and all killed or captured. The attack was renewed two hours later, and strongly pressed against the front of the 12th Australian Brigade and the left of the 35th Divn. The 35th Divn put every machine gun it had into the firing line and directed all its guns on to the sector. Although suffering from continuous bombardment, the Germans surged forward and crowded into Dernancourt in the hope of forming a bridgehead on the west side of the Ancre. Their first attack ended in a disorderly retreat; the second and most dangerous was anticipated by a bayonet charge from the north of two companies, about a hundred men, of the 19/Northumberland Fusiliers, and elsewhere stopped by the fire of the Australians. Other attacks were stopped entirely by fire, the Australians, after

¹ On Sketch 6 Ribemont is at the spot marked by 35 (35th Divn) at the head of the re-entrant there.

one of them, chasing the enemy away by an immediate counter-attack; subsequently he contented himself with shelling. All attempts, however, by the 35th Divn and 4th Australian Division to recover Dernancourt failed.¹

The position of the men of the 35th Divn in the small Marett Wood was always precarious; accordingly Lieut.-General Congreve, about 10 A.M., suggested to Major-General Monash that the 3rd Australian Division should advance its left flank to the wood. A reinforcement from the 10th Australian Brigade (Br.-General W. R. McNicoll) was therefore sent up, arriving in time to assist in the defeat of the third German attack there.

General Monash had been told when his division came into the line that the corps commander intended to undertake an advance at an early date towards Morlancourt. During the course of the morning he received two orders: first to support the attack of the 1st Cavalry Division, south of the Somme, by advancing his right flank to Sailly Lorette if possible; secondly, to advance his whole line to the cross-spurs which jut out from the ridge between the Somme and the Ancre near their junction. The advance, by stages, of the 11th (Br.-General J. H. Cannan) and 10th Australian Brigades began at 3.40 P.M. Owing to the enemy's stout resistance and machine-gun fire, the movement proved difficult, and the final objective was not reached; but by 8.30 P.M. the Australians had gained a line about six hundred yards forward, but short of Sailly Lorette, on the right, and twelve hundred yards on the left.

In the V. Corps sector (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe), from Albert along the Ancre to Hamel, held by the 17th and 12th Divns, the Germans in Albert at first remained quiet; but, beginning at 9 A.M., they attempted to enlarge their bridgehead covering Aveluy. This attack was repulsed by infantry fire, and the enemy reinforcements which could be seen massing were driven back by gun fire, so that they recrossed the Ancre suffering heavy loss. By 10 A.M. the attack was over. Farther north, near Authuille, the enemy artillery fire was so severe that some ground was lost in Aveluy Wood. Nevertheless a line was re-established, and at 1.45 P.M., after half an hour's bombardment, a counter-attack of parts of four battalions of the 2nd and 12th Divns was launched, with the result

¹ Sergeant S. R. McDougall, 47th Australian Battalion, was awarded the V.C. for his action in dealing with the 4.30 A.M. German attack.

that the lost ground was recovered. Farther north again, in the neighbourhood of Hamel there was heavy shelling and some movement of enemy infantry ; but the attack was smothered before it really developed. Arrangements were then made by Lieut.-General Fanshawe to bring up reinforcements from the 2nd and 47th Divns, while twenty-four whippet tanks of the 3rd Tank Battalion, which had come up on the 27th, were stationed in a wood behind the centre of the corps front ; but, except the parts of four battalions of the 2nd and 12th Divns already mentioned, it was not found necessary to employ the additional forces. The 36th and 37th Bdes of the 12th Divn (Major-General A. B. Scott) were now so exhausted by continuous fighting, that it was decided to try and relieve them during the night. At 3 P.M. Major-General Pereira (2nd Divn) was put in command of the 12th Divn line for this purpose, but his division was so weak that the 99th Bde could only produce a composite battalion. It was arranged therefore that the 5th and 99th Bdes (Br.-Generals W. L. Osborn and W. E. Ironside) should take over the sector of the 37th Bde, which itself was to shift southwards to occupy half of the front of the 36th. A composite battalion of reinforcements was then organized for the purpose of further reliefs on the night of the 29th/30th.

The V. Corps may be considered to have had a successful day : ground had only been lost temporarily, and very heavy casualties had been inflicted on the enemy.

The IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir G. M. Harper), holding the great re-entrant in the line around Hébuterne with the New Zealand Division, 19th Divn, 62nd Divn (with the 4th Australian Brigade attached), and 42nd Divn, was opposed by nine German divisions in the front line, backed by five more. The corps spent an uneasy night, patrols constantly pressing up against its front, whilst the German artillery was active. There followed a hard day's fighting, the enemy being particularly persistent against the left.

The 2nd New Zealand Brigade (Br.-General R. Young), on the right, suffered a good deal from gun and machine-gun fire, and from strong bombing attacks up old trenches, which persisted until 10 P.M., when the last of them was supported by an advance above ground. All were repulsed. The 3rd and 1st New Zealand Brigades (Br.-Generals H. T. Fulton, who was killed in the evening, and C. W. Melvill) not only kept off the enemy, but improved

their positions and strengthened their line by short advances, the last carried out at 4 P.M. in pouring rain, being the most successful.

Northwards the Germans in their efforts to swing round, with Hébuterne as a pivot, attacked in a more desperate manner. At 8.15 A.M., after two hours' shelling of the 42nd Divn (Major-General A. Solly-Flood) on the left, an attack was launched against it from Ablainzevelle, only to be stopped by fire. The bombardment was then renewed and widened so as to include the 62nd Divn (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite, C.R.A., Br.-General A. T. Anderson), still holding Bucquoy, which commands the ground on all sides. Soon after 9 A.M. attacks were made simultaneously without success against Hébuterne, Rossignol Wood and Bucquoy, held by the 4th Australian Brigade (Br.-General C. H. Brand), the 187th Bde (Lieut.-Colonel C. K. James, acting), and 185th Bde (Br.-General Viscount Hampden) respectively. Elsewhere, too, the Germans displayed great activity and a concentration opposite the 186th Bde (Br.-General J. L. G. Burnett, between the 187th and 185th) was dispersed by the accurate divisional artillery barrage. Hardly had this been accomplished than an attack was made on the 126th Bde (Br.-General W. W. Seymour), on the extreme left. This also was dispersed by the combined fire of guns, machine guns and rifles. At 10.30 A.M. the Germans made a second attempt opposite the 186th Bde. : time after time they advanced up the open slope, only to fall and melt away. Undeterred by losses, at 11.15 A.M. large forces advanced from Logeast Wood against the 126th and 127th (Br.-General Hon. A. M. Henley) Bdes, where the troops left their trenches the better to mow down their opponents. Some Germans, nevertheless, managed to penetrate the line, but were expelled by an immediate counter-attack of the 6th and 8/Manchester: they were all shot down except an officer and one man, who were taken prisoner. For three hours the enemy had been held off and it was not until between midday and 2 P.M. that he gained a success, pushing through Rossignol Wood into the gap between the 4th Australian Brigade and the 187th Bde, thus forcing the right of the latter to fall back. Soon after 1 P.M., too, he had a small temporary success by a bombing attack directed from the ruins of Ablainzevelle against the 127th Bde; but this was stopped by counter-attack.

Reinforcements were now becoming available. At 11 A.M., in consequence of reports of fighting all along the corps line,

Lieut.-General Harper had ordered the 41st Divn (Major-General Sir S. T. B. Lawford) to move forward again ; it was not until 3 P.M., however, that the 122nd and 124th Bdes (Br.-Generals F. W. Towsey and W. F. Clemson) reached the Purple Line. Orders were then issued for them to recapture Rossignol Wood, arrangements being made by Major-General Braithwaite for artillery support and for the co-operation of the 4th Australian Brigade, which had improved its position by the seizure of the quarries three hundred yards to its right front. Meantime, the Germans had advanced to the old trenches around Nameless Farm.¹ The 14th Australian Battalion recovered the farm, but the 122nd and 124th Bdes made little progress. The 8/West Yorkshire (185th Bde), also sent to assist, not knowing the ground, did not advance until about 2 A.M. on the 29th : as it was quite dark, the battalion could then do no more than get into the northern corner of the wood. With better staff arrangements for a combined effort the wood might have been recovered. As the 187th Bde was now found too weak even to hold its line, the 185th Bde was moved to its support.

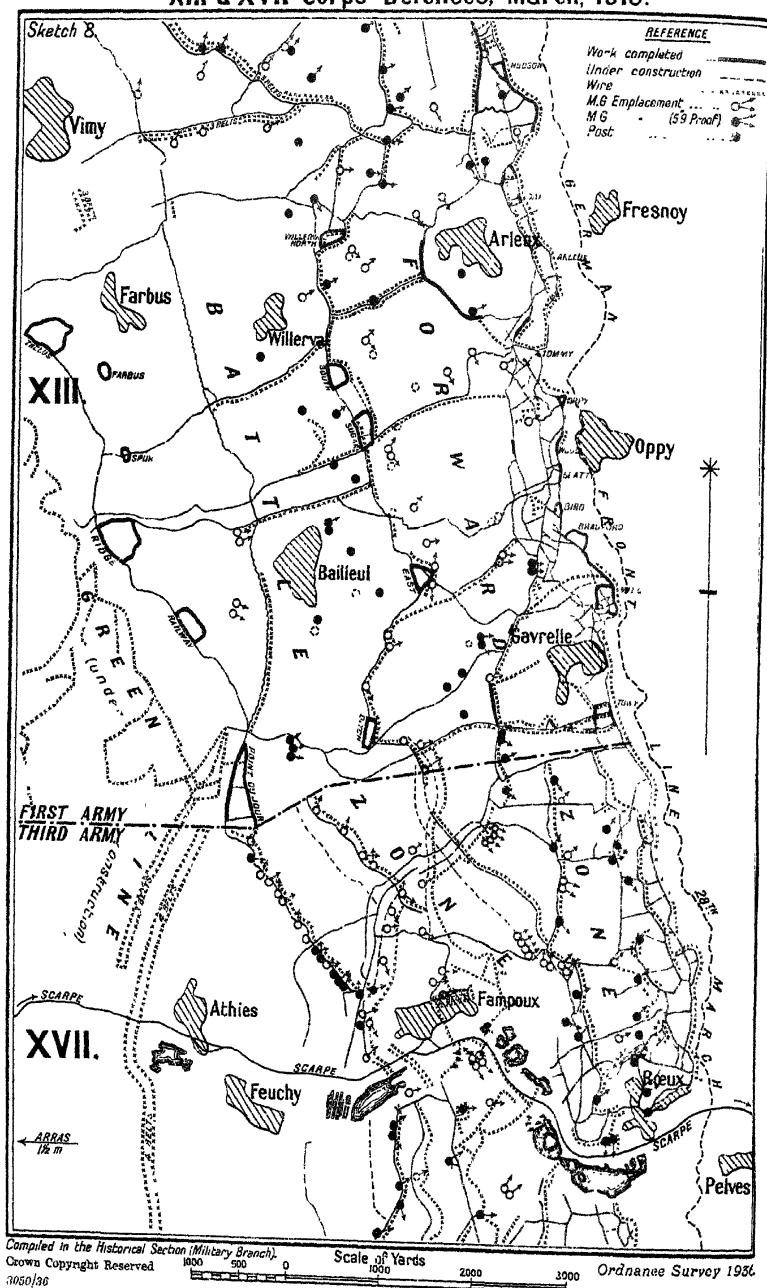
The position of the IV. Corps, therefore, except for the slight gains of the New Zealand Division and the 4th Australian Brigade, was practically unchanged. But the men of the divisions who had been in the fighting line many days were dead tired and hungry, and as artillery fire continued into the night on both sides, the situation remained full of anxiety.

Up to this point the fighting on the Third Army front had been of the character of the semi-open warfare in improvised positions, which it had assumed in the days after the 22nd March. Rifle, machine gun, trench mortar and field gun were always in action, but the Germans had not brought forward their heavy artillery, while most of the British weapons of that category—at any rate those over 6-inch—had been sent back. The 31st and Guards Divns, the right of the VI. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir J. A. L. Haldane), were deployed in extemporized positions, with a wide and uncertain No Man's Land before them in which patrols wandered. Thence northward to the Scarpe, the 3rd Division of the VI. Corps and 15th Division of the XVII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson), which had not been

Sketch 8.

¹ Half a mile west of Rossignol Wood, the scene of heavy fighting on 1st July 1916.

XIII & XVII Corps Defences, March, 1918.



seriously attacked and had only swung back to keep touch with the rest of the Army, still occupied the Battle Zone; while north of the Scarpe, the 4th Division of the XVII. Corps, and beyond that, the First Army (General Sir H. Horne) held the original Forward Zone, with a narrow No Man's Land of little more than a hundred yards in front of it. Against this part of the line, extending from the 81st Divn to the 56th and 3rd Canadian Divisions of the XIII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle) of the First Army, the Germans had brought up a great mass of heavy artillery,¹ "the battering train", which had been moved northwards after employment on the 21st March, for the purpose of breaking through opposite Arras on both sides of the Scarpe by the attacks "Mars, North and South", these having long been in preparation. The signs of imminent attack had been evident for some days, and the Intelligence Section of the First Army had been able to forecast that it would not extend farther north than a line just north of Oppy Wood. Increase of artillery, flagged routes, trench-mortar positions, and the activities of large working parties confirmed this estimate. On the 23rd a prisoner was captured who stated that the attack would take place on the 25th, and from that date harassing fire was kept up throughout the night.²

At 3 A.M. a violent bombardment, exactly similar in character to that of the 21st March was opened on the whole front of the VI., XVII. and XIII. Corps. Batteries were gassed; back areas through which reinforcements must pass, command posts and telephone exchanges were shelled with long-range guns; telephone lines were cut; rear lines and the front lines were systematically bombarded, and, finally, came intense trench-mortar fire.³ The infantry in the front line soon realized that they "were for it". A few minutes before the assault, their conclusion was confirmed by the sight of a glistening line of bayonets, those of the Germans ready "to go over the top", rising as it seemed out of the morning mist. The main attack, it is

¹ "Extraordinary masses of artillery and ammunition were employed". Ludendorff ii., p. 604.

² Other prisoners stated that they were expected to reach the sea in four days, and had been provided with six days' rations.

³ According to Crown Prince Rupprecht's orders, from 3 to 4.30 A.M. the enemy batteries were to be gassed; from 4.30 to 7.30 A.M., the objectives bombarded; assault at 7.30 A.M. The left of the *Seventeenth Army*, however, opposite the British VI. Corps, was not to open artillery fire until 5 A.M. Schwarte iii., p. 392. It appeared, on the contrary, to begin to lift about 5 A.M.

now known, was directed against the 3rd, 15th, 4th and 56th Divisions, which had nothing in support or reserve behind them. Against them were flung nine German divisions, with two in support.¹ In desperation at the obvious failure of his original plan, and departing from his usual policy of looking for weak places, Ludendorff had for once ordered the assault of one of the strongest sectors of the Western Front.

Opposite the 31st Divn (Major-General R. J. Bridgford), which had four battalions of the 4th Guards Brigade and 93rd Bde (Br.-General Hon. L. J. P. Butler and Lieut.-Colonel R. D. Temple) in the front defences, with the 97th Brigade (Br.-General J. M. Minshull-Ford) of the 32nd Division, arrived in the early morning from Ypres, in support behind the right, the enemy infantry advanced at 7.30 A.M.² It drove in the forward posts, but was then forced back by fire followed by a counter-attack, leaving many dead behind. A further attempt was made at 9 A.M., and again, after another half an hour's bombardment, at 10.30 A.M. Both these attacks were repelled with heavy loss : masses of troops in marching order, according to an eye-witness, appeared on the skyline and struggled on, some to within one hundred and fifty yards of our line, without much artillery or machine-gun support, only to be smashed by our guns and machine guns. The whole foreground was dotted with dead, while in the distance figures could be seen running in every direction. Nevertheless, Major-General Bridgford judged it wise to move up his pioneer battalion in close support, so that it might be ready to counter-attack, still leaving his R.E. field companies, the 92nd Bde (Br.-General O. de L. Williams) and the personnel of the trench-mortar batteries in reserve. During the afternoon another attack was made, but was stopped dead by a field artillery barrage. The last unsuccessful effort to break through at Ayette was made at 6.45 P.M. ; but, even after this repulse, snipers, patrols and machine guns continued to give trouble.

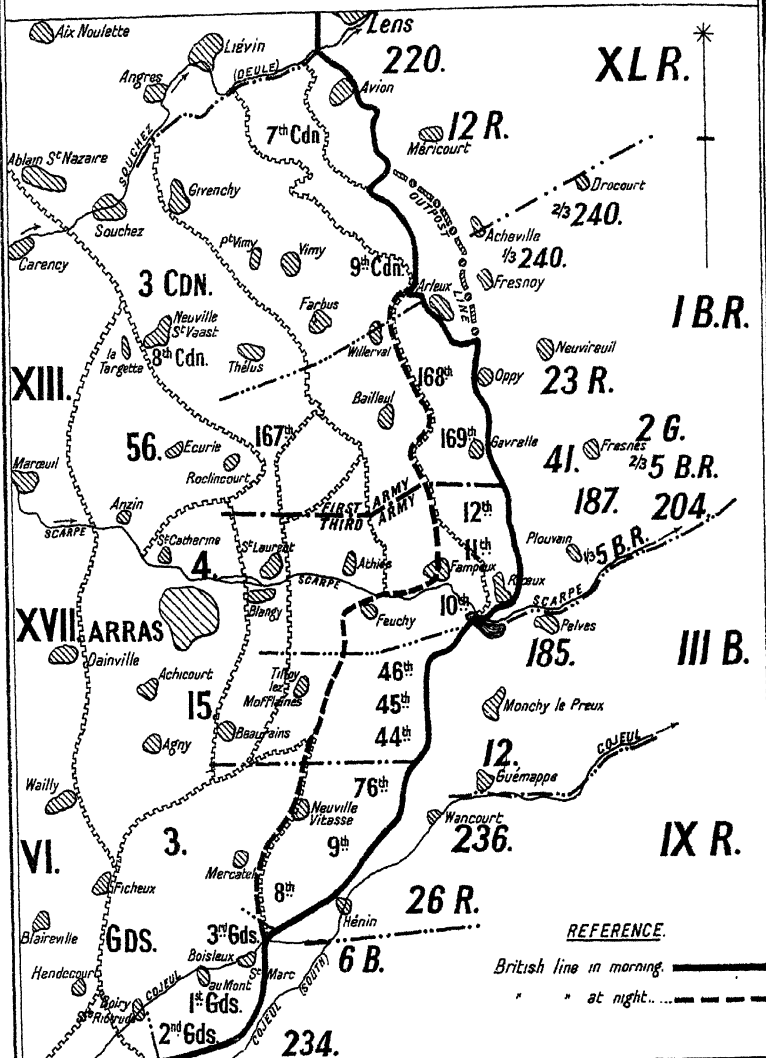
Although it suffered badly from artillery fire, the Guards Divn (Major-General G. P. T. Feilding, C.R.A. Br.-General F. A. Wilson) had an easier time, thanks to its enterprise. Early in the morning its patrols discovered the Germans

¹ According to Schwarte iii., p. 392, however, in addition, the *XVIII. Corps*, opposite the 31st and Guards Divns, was to make much the same advance as those north of it, viz., to Berles-Ransart, 4 miles ahead. If this was so, its attempt was nipped in the bud.

² The *16th Bavarian Division* attacked Ayette, the *239th*, *26th* and *6th Bavarian Divisions* northward ; the *234th Division*, with the *221st* and *2nd Guard Reserve* in support, covered the centre and left of the Guards Divn.

Sketch 9.

The Battle of ARRAS 28TH MARCH.

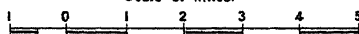


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3051/36

Scale of Miles.



Ordnance Survey 1956.

lined up in the open, not a hundred yards from the British trenches, ready to assault; a message to the artillery quickly brought about their dispersal. Another concentration observed about 11.30 A.M. was dealt with in a similar way. Throughout the day, just as on the front of the 31st Divn, snipers and patrols caused a good many casualties; but the opponents of the 31st and Guards Divns could not claim any progress.

The German objective being the Arras bulwark, the heaviest fighting of the day took place on the front of the 3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Devereil), of the VI. Corps; the 15th (Major-General H. L. Reed), and 4th (Major-General T. G. Matheson) of the XVII. Corps (all Third Army); and the 56th Division (Major-General F. A. Dudgeon) of the XIII. Corps (First Army). These troops were of high quality: two Regular divisions; one Territorial Force division containing some of the very best battalions, which had come out in the winter of 1914-15 to be attached to Regular brigades and had in 1916 been formed into a division; and one New Army Scottish division, the fourth of its type to be sent to France early in 1915. They were disposed across the low spurs which descend from the eastern side of the Artois plateau into the plain of Douai and form an area of small undulations with very gentle slopes. North of the Scarpe, Vimy ridge, about three miles behind the front line, gave complete observation for many miles over all the ground to the east; but south of the river the advantage of observation lay with the enemy. There the long, narrow Monchy le Preux spur extended into his territory, and he was in possession of the high knoll on which the village stands, with excellent observation to the north and to the south, but subject to much fire. He also held the long spur (Hénin Hill, etc.) which extends between the Sensée and the Cojeul rivers, parallel to and overlooking the British line.

Map 4.
Sketch 9.

North of the Scarpe, where no attack had as yet taken place in 1918, the British were in complete possession of the defences: Forward Zone, Battle Zone and Green Line.¹ South of the Scarpe, where ground had been abandoned, the 3rd and 15th Divisions still held a considerable portion of the Battle Zone—which had thus become the Forward Zone

¹ The term "Green Line", hitherto used, is maintained here, but by this time the defences had been developed, and comprised at least a front and support line, both wired.

—but they were handicapped by the fact that the new work designed to adapt the defences to the altered situation showed up clearly in the chalk soil, an easy target to the enemy artillery. The river Scarpe, which divided the battle front, is much like the Basingstoke canal, and passable only at the bridges; it has marshy edges full of reeds and bulrushes, and poplars on the banks.

Sketch 8.

A very great deal of work had been done on the defences, as the corps commanders, Lieut.-Generals Haldane, Fergusson and MacCracken (the last-named was succeeded by Lieut.-General de Lisle on the 18th March), warned by the counter-attack at Cambrai, felt that the Germans were by no means "dead". Although the maps showed zones tinted in different colours, the defences consisted in reality of lines, with strongpoints in them, and switches; in the intervals between the lines there were machine-gun posts and belts of wire. The First Army had for many months laid stress on treating the front line as an outpost line, and concentrating all defensive resources on the Battle Zone. The XIII. Corps had carried out this system—in fact, the front line had been described by the 56th Division when it took over as "most dilapidated". The general reasons for this sound policy were reinforced by the fact that the front line of the Forward Zone was a little too far from the guns on Vimy ridge for effective support.¹

An attack being imminent, General Horne (First Army), knowing what had happened in the Forward Zone of the Fifth Army, about 1 P.M. on the 27th directed that the Forward Zone of the 56th and 3rd Canadian Divisions should be abandoned by its usual garrison on the night of the 27th/28th, and held only by outposts. In the XVII. Corps, the Forward Zone and the Battle Zone were both well developed, and it was intended to fight in the Forward Zone. The 4th Division had practised a system of evacuating the front line by day when barrages fell on it, and retiring to trenches a short distance in rear, but still in the Forward Zone; the front line was, however, re-occupied at night. The proposed action of the XIII. Corps in evacuating the Forward Zone would thus result in the exposure of the flank of the XVII. Corps for two thousand yards, and for the

¹ The system therefore differed from that in the VI. and XVII. Corps of the Third Army; these relied on lines connected by communication trenches, but with strongpoints as bastions in the lines and as rallying points. The XIII. Corps certainly had a number of strongpoints in the Forward Zone (called "posts" for short), but relied on them only for guard purposes, not for fighting out a battle.

latter to conform to the order of the First Army would entail abandoning some of its strongest defences. After communication with the Third Army it was settled between the corps commanders that a complete withdrawal from the Forward Zone should not be carried out, and the divisions were informed of this decision. Thus both the 4th and 56th Divisions, and also the 3rd Canadian Division, though keeping a considerable proportion of troops in the Forward Zone, held the front line lightly, and thereby saved many casualties.

In the XVII. Corps, each division had divided its sector between its three brigades; but in the XIII. Corps, each division retained one brigade in reserve behind the Green Line.¹

The distribution of the battalions between the three zones was as follows:

	Divisions			
	3rd	15th	4th	56th
Forward Zone	(already lost)		3½	3¾
Battle Zone (the front zone of the 3rd and 15th Divisions)	5	4½	3½	4¼*
Between Battle Zone and Green Line	2	1½	—	—
Green Line	3*	4*	3¼*	2

* Includes the pioneer battalion. For comparison, it is recalled that on 21st March the Fifth Army had in the Forward Zone, 36½, Battle Zone, 43½, Green Line, 29½ battalions, and the three corps of the Third Army which were attacked, 28½, 47½ and 4 battalions. On 28th March, therefore, the front zone was more thickly garrisoned than on 21st March, in the proportion of 6 to 5, but the front line of the zone was more thinly held. As regards the fronts held by divisions, excluding the two divisions on Gough's right (58th Division, 16,000 yards and 18th Division, 10,000 yards), there was little difference. The average front of the remaining 9 divisions of the Fifth Army on the 21st was just under 5,400 yards, and of the four divisions in front of Arras on the 28th, 5,250; but the latter had stronger defences.

The field artillery was distributed immediately east and west of the Green Line;² the heavy artillery was two miles behind it; and a few super-heavy guns and howitzers

¹ The 3rd Canadian Division had had all three brigades in line, but when at midday of the 27th it passed from the Canadian Corps to the XIII. Corps, the 56th Division had been ordered to prolong its front 1,500 yards northward to Arleux Post, on the outskirts of Arleux, and the centre Canadian Brigade, the 9th, to extend southwards, so as to release the 8th Brigade. These movements had not been quite completed when the enemy bombardment opened at 3 A.M. on the 28th.

² The C.R.A.'s were: 3rd Division, Br.-General J. S. Ollivant; 4th, Br.-General C. A. Sykes; 15th, Br.-General E. B. Macnaghten; and 56th, Br.-General R. J. G. Elkington.

(12-inch and 15-inch) still farther back. The reserves consisted of the divisional engineer companies and details; the corps cyclist battalions; and, in the case of the XVII. Corps, the 7th Machine Gun Squadron (Household Cavalry) which was divided between the 15th and 4th Divisions.

Map 4. At 2 A.M. all were on the alert. The morning was dark ;
Sketch 9. not a sound could be heard and patrols reported that not a German was stirring in No Man's Land. Then at 3 A.M. came the crash of bombardment : it opened with mustard-gas shelling of the battery positions, and it was very thorough. South of the Scarpe, which front will be dealt with first, from 4.15 A.M. onwards the bombardment was directed on the front trenches of the 3rd and 15th Divisions, though on parts of the line, either by intention or by bad ranging, not a shell fell. At 5.15 A.M. fire began to lift, apparently progressing from south to north,¹ and, after a large body of German aeroplanes had flown along the line using their machine guns, the German infantry, which had worked forward to the wire, began to make determined attempts to break in, beginning on the right.

At 5.50 A.M., the 8th and 9th Brigades (Br.-Generals B. D. Fisher and H. C. Potter) were attacked ; at 6.45 A.M., the 76th (Br.-General C. C. Porter) ; at 6 A.M., the 44th (Br.-General E. Hilliam) ; at 7.10 A.M., the 45th (Br.-General W. H. L. Allgood) ; and at 7.30 A.M., the 46th (Br.-General A. F. Lumsden). Possibly, it was designed to obtain a right wheel by this variation of time.

In spite of losses from the bombardment, during which all the forward anti-tank guns were knocked out—a matter of little consequence as the enemy employed no tanks—most of the trench mortars and machine guns, housed below ground and disposed in depth, remained to do good service, so that the assaulting Germans were met by every description of fire. The S.O.S. signals could not be seen, and the buried cable lines between the observation posts on the ridges overlooking the front and the battery positions behind them had practically all been cut ; but the artillery, although greatly handicapped by the failure of cable communication, recognized the change in the targets of the enemy bombardment and opened fire. Being thus strongly resisted the Germans were unable to effect any general break-in ; only one small entry was made, on the right flank

¹ The bombardment was to last 4½ hours, but, as on 21st March, some of the infantry began to assault before zero hour.

of the 44th Brigade, where a company of the 7/Cameron Highlanders in the front line had been reduced to twelve men. The rest of the line held good, the junctions of battalions, so often weak points, being secured by "liaison posts" composed of mixed detachments of the companies and battalions concerned. Throughout the fighting heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy, as wave after wave came on through smoke and shell fire, forming excellent targets.

Soon after 7 A.M. the situation began to develop rapidly. Enemy infantry could be seen moving up the Arras—Cambrai road and working forward under the cover afforded by the rolling ground south-west of Monchy le Preux. Reaching the small gap in the front of the Battle Zone already made, Germans began to appear behind the 44th and 45th Brigades, which fell back to the rear line of the Battle Zone. About the same time, around 7.30 A.M., an enemy party made an entry into the line of the 8th Brigade, and then began to bomb outwards. Another detachment drove a wedge into the front of the 9th Brigade. Both these brigades then gradually fell back to the rear line of the Battle Zone. At 7.30 A.M., too, the right flank of the 46th Brigade was swept away. By 8.30 A.M., therefore, the front line of the 3rd and 15th Divisions had been lost, with the exception of two small sectors, one in the centre of the 76th Brigade—which by 10 A.M. was in German hands—and the other on the left of the 46th; but the rear line of the Battle Zone was still held.

From 8.40 A.M. onwards the Germans delivered a series of assaults against the new position, each preceded by a bombardment, called for by green lights sent up by the foremost troops, who, as soon as the guns lifted, would renew the assault. An eyewitness records that the attacks were "an example of perfect infiltration, and the way in which light signals met with response from the German artillery was an object lesson". Continuous and confused fighting ensued, during which a few German patrols managed to get through, turn the defenders from the rear and attack the Neuville Vitasse Switch. Where the Germans penetrated, defensive flanks were formed, and the machine guns placed ready to deal with such infiltration took heavy toll of the attackers. Events moved so quickly, however, that before such counter-attacks as were ordered could take place, the situation had, as a rule, changed.

In the course of the morning both Major-General

Deverell and Major-General Reed instructed their brigadiers that the enemy was to be checked as far forward as possible, but that the Green Line must be held at all costs. For this purpose, at 11 A.M. the G.O.C. 15th Division ordered his artillery to fall back. For the most part the defence of the rear line of the Battle Zone was stoutly maintained until between midday and 1 P.M.; but after that hour, when the 15th Division artillery had shifted to its new positions, a retirement of both divisions gradually set in, apparently on the misunderstanding that, the Battle Zone being actually the front zone, the Green Line was now the main line of resistance. By 2 P.M. the majority of the troops were moving back to the Green Line or were in trenches between it and the Battle Zone; they were followed up by the enemy who was delayed here and there by the firing of a few mines which had been prepared for such an occasion. The 9th Brigade (13/King's, 1/Northumberland Fusiliers and a company of the 4/Royal Fusiliers), however, was still in possession of six hundred yards of the rear line of the Battle Zone, where it remained until 3.30 P.M. It then fell back to the Green Line, anticipating by one hour Major-General Deverell's order that all troops in advance of that line should withdraw to it after dark.

Although both flanks were in the air, the battalions of the 9th Brigade, under the personal direction of Lieut.-Colonels T. B. Lawrence (13/King's) and E. M. Moulton-Barrett (1/Northumberland Fusiliers) and their battalion headquarters, carried out the movement with complete success, having no men cut off, evacuating all the wounded, keeping up fire from each position with a few men whilst the rest retired, and repelling the Germans heavily when they dared to attack. Neuville Vitasse was held by the 8/King's Own (76th Brigade) until 4.30 P.M. The shelling then became intense and the Germans fought their way in, so that the battalion was forced to form a line of posts west of the village.

The withdrawal of the 15th Division to the Green Line was completed by 3 P.M., a little earlier than that of the 3rd. The situation appeared to be the most critical of the day, and Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson sent up the corps cyclist battalion and all details from the wagon lines to reinforce the 15th Division. A battalion of tanks which had been placed at his disposal was moved to the right flank, but was not engaged. Soon it became evident that the combined fire of artillery, machine guns, Lewis guns

and rifles which had beaten for more than seven hours on the German infantry was beginning to take effect; their advance began to slacken, the few parties which pressed on were easily dealt with, and by 5 P.M. the German attack upon the 3rd and 15th Divisions definitely ceased. "Mars South" had failed. An hour later, under Major-General Reed's orders, but at the suggestion of the G.O.C. 4th Division, the 45th and 46th Brigades, in conjunction with the 10th Brigade (Br.-General H. W. Green) of the 4th Division on the left, as the 44th Brigade was too far back, advanced and established themselves on a line roughly parallel to the Green Line and six hundred yards east of it.

In view of the fact that the attack might be renewed next day, the Third Army commander, shortly after 6 P.M., released the two divisions (the 2nd Canadian and 1st Canadian) in Army reserve, and placed them at the disposal of the VI. and XVII. Corps. At 7 P.M., therefore, Major-General Deverell was able to inform his troops that, although they would not be relieved until the night of the 29th/30th, two brigades of the 2nd Canadian Division (Major-General H. E. Burstall) were moving up in rear of them; in fact the 4th and 5th Canadian Brigades and two machine-gun companies arrived on the Purple Line between 1 and 2 A.M. on the 29th, behind the 3rd and 15th Divisions.¹ When the Third Army placed the 1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. C. Macdonell) at the disposal of Lieut.-General Sir C. Fergusson, he ordered the 1st Canadian Brigade to the assistance of the 15th Division.²

The Germans made their greatest effort north of the Scarpe, where seven divisions, including the two in second line, were launched against the 4th and 56th Divisions. The former had all three brigades in the line, the 10th (Br.-General H. W. Green), the 11th (Br.-General T. S. H. Wade), and the 12th (Br.-General E. A. Fagan); and the latter, two, the 169th (Br.-General E. S. D'E. Coke) and the 168th (Br.-General G. G. Loch), with the 167th

¹ Since the 26th, the 2nd Canadian Division had been concentrated in the Basseux area, 7 miles south-west of Arras, behind the Guards Divn.

² The 1st Canadian Division on the night of the 27th/28th had been moving south from north-west of Arras to the rear of the IV. Corps. At 11.5 A.M. on the 28th, whilst in the process of concentration, it was ordered (infantry by bus) to an area 6 miles west of Arras, 10 miles north of its previous destination. At 7.20 P.M., the 1st Brigade was diverted to the 15th Division. At 10 P.M., the 3rd Brigade was ordered to proceed to Arras, where it was safely underground in the caves east of the town before the enemy re-opened artillery fire on the 29th.

(Br.-General G. H. B. Freeth) in reserve.¹ The bombardment lasted the full $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours, and included the right of the 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General L. J. Lipsett), the violence of the artillery being augmented after 5 A.M. by that of many trench mortars. Most of the front line posts were obliterated, but in view of the probability of such an occurrence those of the 4th Division and many of those of the 56th had been evacuated; where this was not the case, the troops occupying them were lost. The last message from one post was, "The Germans are on the wire. We'll do our best."²

Nevertheless, shortly before 7.30 A.M., when the enemy infantrymen began to advance over a No Man's Land less than a hundred yards wide, they were held up long enough to lose the advantage of their creeping barrage. When, later, they did make some progress in the Forward Zone, they became involved in a mass of old trenches and other obstacles, at the same time encountering gunfire from back positions and carefully sited groups of machine guns.³ A barrage was also dropped on the front system from batteries on and forward of Vimy ridge; but the guns sited on the rear slopes, handicapped by the cutting of the cables leading to the O.P.'s, could not render much assistance except by firing on rear areas.⁴

The boundary between the 4th and 56th Divisions ran in a shallow valley, where the trenches were in swampy ground and badly overlooked. They had been filled in for a length of three hundred yards with loose barbed wire, the gap being flanked by strongpoints and guarded by support trenches. The bombardment, however, had wrecked the posts, and so the attackers were able to force their way up this valley, thus turning the inner flanks of the two divisions. Only at two other points did the enemy make even a small

¹ For distribution in depth, see page 63 and Map 4.

² The only two fully garrisoned posts, Towy Post (behind the support line), south of Gavrelle, and Wood Post (the original "Wood Post" had been obliterated on 21st March; the new one was nearby in the front line, immediately west of Oppy), were probably not located by the enemy, and escaped destruction. Their garrisons, of the 1/16th London (Queen's Westminster Rifles) and 1/4th London (Royal Fusiliers), offered a firm resistance until surrounded; and even then the survivors, 4 officers and 40 men, cut their way out.

³ These had "spider web" wire, not visible from an aeroplane photograph, round them.

⁴ The guns of the 56th Division had been placed east of the ridge, protected by concrete shelters; but on the night of the 27/28th they were withdrawn to alternative positions and thus escaped the bombardment which destroyed the emplacements.

entry in the defences beyond the front line. One of these points was immediately south of the 2/Essex (12th Brigade), whose northern flank was already turned by the German advance up the shallow valley. After desperate fighting, the battalion was overwhelmed about 10.30 A.M. Only thirty-five survivors rejoined battalion headquarters;¹ then, being reinforced by details, they manned a switch running from the Battle Zone to the back of the Forward Zone on the boundary of the 56th Division.

The 1/Hampshire (11th Brigade), south of the Essex, was in its turn attacked in flank as well as in front; after suffering very severely it managed to fall back, and by 9.30 A.M. was established partly in the front of the Battle Zone and partly in the reserve line of the Forward Zone. The 2/Seaforth Highlanders (10th Brigade), next to the south, was now left isolated in the Roeux area, as the troops south of the Scarpe had fallen back. Major-General Matheson therefore ordered the brigade to withdraw the battalion. The Seaforth, suffering considerably from the enemy's barrage, fell back by slow stages to a line of trenches east of Fampoux. In consequence, also, of the retirement of the troops south of the Scarpe, a defensive flank was formed soon after 9 A.M. along the northern bank of the river by the 1/Somerset L.I., which was then the reserve of the 11th Brigade.

In the 56th Division, the 169th Brigade had been turned on its right by the Germans, who penetrated into the shallow valley, and on its left by the rupture of the front of its left battalion, the 1/5th London; it soon had to fall back to the reserve line of the Forward Zone. Here the right battalion, the 1/16th London, took heavy toll of Germans advancing shoulder to shoulder through Gavrelle, and held on until nearly 10.30 A.M., when its right flank was again turned.

The 1/5th London, reinforced by the battalion headquarters, also took advantage of the remarkable targets presented by masses of German infantry moving frontally over the open against them; but in the course of time the battalion had gradually to withdraw, making use of a communication trench, to the front line of the Battle Zone, which was reached soon after 9.30 A.M.²

The front line of the 1/4th London, the right battalion

¹ The casualties were 13 officers and 418 other ranks.

² When reorganized there were only 4 officers and 64 other ranks out of 23 and 564.

of the 168th Brigade, was overwhelmed, except one post,¹ at the first rush, and the defence was conducted from the secondary position in the reserve trenches of the Forward Zone; but the 1/13th London (Kensingtons), on the left, maintained its first position. In the course of further fighting the enemy managed to push in at the junction between the 169th and 168th Brigades and between the inner flanks of the 1/4th and 1/13th London; but these small penetrations were at once dealt with by enfilade fire and small counter-attacks. Until 10 A.M. it may be said that the 56th Division pretty well held its own; only the 1/5th London had completely withdrawn from the Forward Zone, and was in or slightly in rear of the front trench of the Battle Zone.

Major-Generals Matheson and Dudgeon had both begun to bring up such reserves as were at their disposal. In the 4th Division, the three field companies R.E. were moved from Etrun (divisional headquarters, north-west of Arras) to the Green Line, where, after being joined by the pioneer battalion, they acted as a reserve brigade, under Lieut.-Colonel C. R. Johnson, the C.R.E. A provisional battalion also was formed out of transport and other details which had been left behind, in order to hold the "Red Line", just west of Arras. In the 56th Division, as the attack did not extend north of Oppy, the reserves, two battalions of the 167th Brigade and one field company R.E., were moved to the southern flank of the division near Roclincourt (divisional headquarters).² Informed of this fact and in view of the general situation Major-General Lipsett (3rd Canadian Division) moved his reserves southward.³

Between 10 A.M. and 1 P.M. the Germans made a little progress against the 4th and 56th Divisions.⁴ Finding that any advance over the open was proving too costly, they tried to work up the communication trenches, with the help

¹ Wood Post, previously mentioned.

² The remaining battalion, two field companies R.E. and the pioneer battalion, were mostly in the rear line of the Battle Zone.

³ He had earlier sent the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles to man two posts behind the rear line of the Battle Zone in the 56th Division area; he had also moved up troops to man the Green Line near the boundary, and sent the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles to occupy the line at the junction of the 4th and 56th Divisions behind the Battle Zone.

⁴ About noon a German aeroplane, carrying three officers, was shot down near Oppy; the pilot had a map on him which showed the plan of the attack: eight divisions attacking, with one in reserve to "mop up" Arras. The final objective for the day was Blaireville—Arras—Bailleul—Arleux. Should this be successful, "Valkyrie" (see Sketch 3) was to be launched next, so as to secure the coal mines in the Béthune area.

of strong artillery support. By this means, a company of the 2/Lancashire Fusiliers (12th Brigade), in a switch on the left of the 4th Division, was cut off and annihilated, only six unwounded men escaping.¹

Thus the right of the 169th Brigade was endangered ; moreover, the enemy was now found to be making progress south of the Scarpe. Feeling that the 4th Division might have to swing back to meet a flank attack, at 10.30 A.M. Major-General Dudgeon—with the approval of Lieut.-General de Lisle (XIII. Corps), who had come to his headquarters at Roclincourt—ordered the retirement of the 169th to the Battle Zone. The 1/5th London and the 1/2nd London (reserve) were already in the Zone, and by 11 A.M. the 1/16th London, still offering a stiff resistance, had fallen back there by way of two communication trenches.

By 11.30 A.M., in the 168th Brigade, the position of the 1/4th London was critical ; for the Germans were working past its right flank, in spite of the severe losses inflicted on them by the field artillery barrage, as well as by the heavy guns which were shelling those attempting to attack frontally from Oppy. At 11.40 A.M., therefore, Major-General Dudgeon, on receipt of corps orders, directed the retirement of the remainder of the 168th Brigade (*i.e.* the 1/14th London) to the Battle Zone, connecting on the left with the 3rd Canadian Division, which had withdrawn its outposts from the Forward Zone, although it continued to hold Arleux Loop, between the two zones, until after dark. Shortly before 1 P.M. the whole of the troops of the 56th Division were in and behind the front line of the Battle Zone.

Meantime, the 4th Division, in spite of splendid support from its artillery, whose ammunition wagons were galloped up to the guns under heavy bombardment, had been similarly hard pressed. The 2/Seaforth Highlanders, cut off from the rest of the 10th Brigade by the advance of the enemy up the Scarpe valley and the destruction of the railway bridge, began, soon after noon, to fall back fighting to Fampoux. North of it the 11th and 12th Brigades withdrew also about 1 P.M., holding off the enemy by bombing and counter-attacks, and reaching the Battle Zone by 1.45 P.M., whilst the artillery caught and stopped by shrapnel fire at three thousand yards enemy batteries which were attempting to advance.

¹ 2/Lieut. B. M. Cassidy was awarded a posthumous V.C. for the example he had set his men.

The front line of both the 4th and 56th Divisions north of the Scarpe was now continuous and established in the front trench of the Battle Zone, already partly garrisoned. The enemy, disheartened by the resistance which he had encountered and the casualties which he had sustained, began to relax his efforts. Although further attempts were made to break the line, they were not so determined as the earlier attacks. At 2 P.M., opposite the 56th Division, under the smoke of a heavy bombardment, enemy field guns were brought up as far forward as the front of the old British front line; but they were knocked out by the divisional artillery before they could come into action. At 4.15 and 5 P.M., infantry attacks were made on the 4th and 56th Divisions, respectively, both up the communication trenches and across the open; these were finally repelled by the concentrated barrage of guns, machine guns and rifles. "Mars North", like "Mars South", had failed.

Nevertheless there still existed a danger spot in the valley of the Scarpe, the troops north of it being in the front of the Battle Zone and those south of it near the Green Line, with only a connecting line along the north bank. At 4 P.M., Major-General Matheson, after hurrying to XVII. Corps headquarters to obtain the co-operation of the 15th Divn, ordered the 10th Brigade to counter-attack north-eastwards from the Green Line, in order to prevent the 11th and 12th Brigades from being outflanked. The advance took place at 6.30 P.M., and was carried out by five companies and the pioneer battalion, part of the 15th Divn co-operating. By 8 P.M., the line had been advanced eight hundred yards, and the enemy had fallen back to the old Battle Zone.

The counter-attack had not gone as far as Major-General Matheson had hoped; so in order to secure the junction between the 15th and 4th Divisions, he ordered the 11th and 12th Brigades, pivoting on their left, to swing back from the front of the Battle Zone to a system of trenches which lay a mile farther to the west and ran due north from a weir on the Scarpe in Fampoux village to join the front lines of the Battle Zone a few hundred yards south of the boundary between the 4th and 56th Divisions. This movement was carried out during the night. As a result of it and of the advance of the 10th Brigade south of the Scarpe, the flank along the north bank of the stream was reduced to about a thousand yards. This

gap caused little anxiety, as there was an extensive swamp east of Fampoux, impassable to troops; the Scarpe was unfordable; and the undergrowth along its banks provided excellent cover for machine-gun posts. Except for desultory fire of 8-inch howitzers on vacated battery positions and an intermittent barrage of 5.9-inch shells on the ground behind them, the Germans gave no further sign of life.

The ammunition expenditure of the field artillery from the morning of the 28th to the morning of the 29th was about 750 rounds per 18-pdr. and 650 rounds per field howitzer, one of the largest of the War; the heavy batteries, too, had opportunities to fire on the enemy in mass formation, never leaving their position though his advanced troops came within six hundred yards of some of them; but it was generally agreed that it was the machine guns skilfully disposed which played the principal part on this day in checking the Germans.

No operation orders except those for the relief of **Map 3.** divisions, already mentioned, were issued by the Third **Sketch 6.** Army on the evening of the 28th; the Fifth Army issued two. The first placed under the XIX. Corps all the British troops in the Fifth Army area down to the line Moreuil—Rouvroy, including the 20th Divn (less one brigade with the French 133rd Divn). The second stated that a new line of defence, about five miles behind Carey's line: the river Luce about Thennes—Gentelles—Bois de Blangy—river Somme, was being prepared and would be continued north and south by the Third Army and the French: but this did not mean that further retreat was contemplated. Sir Douglas Haig during the day had received the good news from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that every fit trained man was being sent to France. He had informed General Rawlinson by letter that although, owing to the necessities of the situation, the Fifth Army had been placed under General Fayolle (G.A.R.), and that he (Rawlinson) was to act upon the latter's orders provided their object was the protection of Amiens, he remained fully responsible for the safety of his troops, just as the Commander-in-Chief himself was for the whole British Army in France: that General Pétain had agreed, before the Fifth Army was handed over, that it should be relieved by French troops as soon as possible: that it was very important to withdraw the divisions in order to

reorganize them : and that, in all circumstances, he was to maintain close touch with, and guard from envelopment, the right of the Third Army.

At 5.15 P.M. Sir Douglas Haig received from General Foch two Notes, containing far from encouraging information : on account of the situation at Montdidier—where the three reinforcing divisions could muster only eight battalions between them—the French could not extend farther north than Le Quesnel ; instead of the Somme, a line nine miles to the south, Le Quesnel—Moreuil—Ailly—Conty would be the Allied boundary : consequently the British Fifth Army, which should have been relieved, must be reconstituted where it stood.¹

The British Commander-in-Chief naturally expected that the enemy would renew his attacks on the morrow ; he was not to know for some time that on the evening of the 28th Ludendorff, recognizing that his plan of crushing the British had failed, had issued orders for the “ Mars ” attack to be stopped ; for the “ Valkyrie ” attack to be abandoned ; and for the “ Georgette ” attack farther north, against Hazebrouck, to be launched as soon as it could be got ready. The First Quartermaster-General had ignored his strategist's advice, that a “ second act ”² should be prepared, to take place immediately the first had run its course : it would now take ten days or more before the battering train of guns and trench mortars, with the appropriate stocks of ammunition, could be in place.

There seem to be several good reasons why the German attack met with less success on the 28th March against the defenders of the Arras front than on the 21st against the Fifth Army. They are, first, that on the 28th the defences were much stronger owing to their having been longer held by the British ;³ secondly, that the average length of a divisional front covering Arras was slightly less than in the Fifth Army ; thirdly, that the front trenches were more lightly held, though, on the whole, the Forward Zone was more strongly garrisoned ; fourthly, that the enemy bombardment, owing to the shorter time available for preparation, was less accurate ; and, fifthly, that there was no fog.

¹ As these two Notes, MS. in General Foch's handwriting, are not mentioned and cannot be found in F.O.A., they are given at length in Note 1 at end of Chapter. General Fayolle was not informed of the new boundary until 12.30 P.M. next day [F.O.A. vi. (i.)].

² See “ 1918 ” Vol. I., pp. 141-2.

³ In particular, there were plenty of deep dug-outs for the detachments near every machine-gun emplacement.

In the Arras battle the German divisions were fresh, as the assaulting divisions had been on the 21st; elsewhere on the 28th, their failure is easily accounted for by the exhaustion of the infantry, the breakdown of supply and transport across the devastated area, and the absence of the usual excellent artillery support.

NOTE I

GENERAL FOCH'S DIRECTIVES OF THE 28TH MARCH

1. La nécessité reste toujours la même d'empêcher l'ennemi de couper l'Armée Anglaise de l'Armée Française.

2. La coupure menaçante tout d'abord au Nord de la Somme, devient inquiétante aujourd'hui au Sud de la Somme, de Montdidier à la Somme.

3. Par suite, les premières divisions françaises absorbées devant Montdidier, ne peuvent étendre le front français vers la Somme.

4. La 5^e Armée Anglaise doit donc y être maintenue coûte que coûte. Elle est à reconstituer sur place.

5. La constitution d'une réserve française autour d'Amiens, d'abord, se poursuit néanmoins, pour commencer elle comprendra les premiers jours d'avril 8 D.I. environ.¹

6. Indépendamment de cela on prévoit la constitution d'une autre réserve française entre Beauvais et Amiens pour plus tard.

F. FOCH.

Clermont, le 28.3.18.

28 mars 1918

17 heures 15

Comme suite à la Note remise le 28/3 au Général Montgomery. La gauche de l'Armée Française ne peut en raison de la bataille de Montdidier, s'étendre plus au Nord que les abords de Quesnel. Ce qui amènerait à prendre comme ligne de démarcation entre les zones des deux Armées Anglaise et Française la ligne générale Quesnel, Moreuil, Ailly sur Noye, Conty, dont la détermination exacte sera réglée par le général Fayolle.

F. FOCH.

NOTE II

THE GERMANS ON THE 28TH MARCH

"As the sun set behind rain clouds there also vanished the hopes which O.H.L. had placed on the attack. 'Mars', to whom so much blood was offered, was unable to break open the British Arras salient and give a fresh aspect to the great battle on the northern wing."²

¹ That is "about 8 infantry divisions".

² Goes, pp. 160-61.

Many excuses have been made for the collapse of the Germans on the 28th. The "Mars" attack, it is said, failed "because it had been insufficiently prepared and mounted too hurriedly: some of the commanders of artillery groups and batteries did not know the new attack procedure, and were not up to their work": the attacking troops encountered uncut wire and became "involved in a maze of trenches". In the Bucquoy—Ablainzeville attacks "even the position of the enemy was not known": "much disturbance was caused by enemy artillery fire and aeroplanes", and the artillery did not give proper support. "The results of the day [for the *Seventeenth Army*] were unsatisfactory and did not fulfil hopes as regards the continuation of the general attack. On the contrary, there was a feeling that the Army, owing to its vanishing offensive powers, had come to a standstill."¹

Of the *Second Army*, it is said briefly that "the 28th brought no great success. . . . The attacks to cross the Ancre failed, in spite of the very greatest efforts. . . . Only the *LI. Corps* [south of the Somme] gained ground near Lamotte: its attempts to push forward against Hamel did not lead to any progress."²

The success of the *Eighteenth Army* near Montdidier is duly recorded; whilst on the rest of the line, which had orders to mark time only, lively artillery fire to smother French batteries is mentioned.

The present head of the German Historical Establishment states: "With the result of the 'Mars' attack, the operation against the British had run itself to a standstill. Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group recommended its continuation after a few days' interval and the renewed thorough preparation of the attack with fresh troops. Ludendorff declined this suggestion, and on the evening of the 28th ordered that (1) the 'Mars' attack should not be renewed; (2) the attack by the left wing of the *Sixth Army*—'Valkyrie'—be dropped; (3) the *Seventeenth Army* make only local attempts during the following days to hold the British; (4) on the other hand, he decided to attack another part of the British front as soon as possible, and ordered the immediate preparation of the attack by the right wing of the *Sixth Army* on the Lys front in the direction of Hazebrouck ('Georgette'): it could not, as far as could be seen, take place for eight or ten days, and was further dependent on the weather; (5) this attack would be followed by an attack against the Belgians by the right wing of the *Fourth Army*, with the object of breaking through across the Loo canal."

Foerster's narrative continues:

"As regards the continuation of the main operations, the only direction which seemed to offer prospects of success was where the front was still fluid, that is on the southern wing of the *Second Army* and opposite the *Eighteenth Army*. From the participation, so far, of the French, which gave the impression of overhaste, the conclusion was drawn that the enemy had not yet been able to build up his forces according to plan. In this he was to be further hindered. The co-operation of the northern wing of the *Second Army* by a forward wheel against the Somme below Amiens could

¹ Schwarte iii., p. 393.

² Lieut.-Colonel W. Foerster, in his "Graf Schlieffen und der Weltkrieg", pp. 286-7.

“certainly not now be counted on. It seemed therefore all the more necessary to capture Amiens itself by the shortest route, and cross the lower Avre.”

The question of an advance on Paris was considered, but the idea was abandoned on account of railway and transport difficulties.¹

“In the afternoon of the 28th, therefore, an order was sent to the *Second Army* to increase the pressure south of the Somme, for which purpose it would be reinforced by two divisions of the *Seventeenth Army*. It was directed to push forward its left wing so that it would reach the line Ailly sur Noye—Thory, beyond the Avre, by the evening of the 30th. The *Eighteenth Army* must to a certain degree await the result of the movement, and only continue its attack on the 30th.”

The *Seventh Army* was also to wait until the 30th. Practically, the *Seventh*, *Eighteenth* and *Seventeenth Armies* were to stand fast, whilst the left wing of the *Second* pushed on towards Amiens.

¹ “Streitfragen des Weltkrieges”, by General E. Kabisch.

CHAPTER IV

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*continued*)

29TH MARCH 1918

THE BATTLE OF THE AVRE (*continued*)¹

(Maps 5, 6 ; Sketch 10)

DURING the night of the 28th/29th, rain began to fall, icy cold, filling the shell craters and enormously increasing transport difficulties. The day, Good Friday, which followed was dark, and the sky covered with heavy rain clouds. No events of importance took place: it was relatively the quietest day since the fighting had begun on the 21st March, except that, between Montdidier and the Luce, the French First Army, the link between the Allied Forces, was again driven back a short distance.

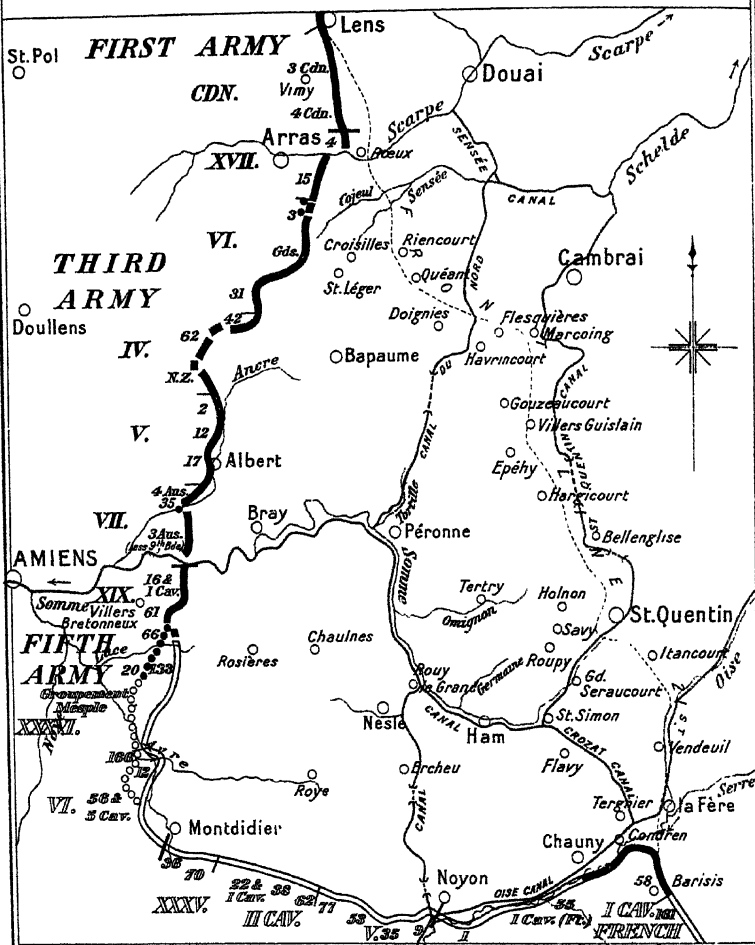
A conference took place at Abbeville between General Foch, Sir Douglas Haig, and their chief General Staff officers, Generals Weygand and Lawrence, of which it is recorded that the two commanders were in agreement as regards the general plan of operations, while General Foch stated that everything was being done "to expedite the "arrival of French divisions to co-operate on the right of "the British and cover Amiens".

North of the Somme, by order of the German O.H.L., attacks had ceased, the enemy operations being reduced to artillery fire and small local raids, with much bomb throwing and sniping, for the purpose of giving the impression that the great battle of the 28th would be continued. As the Germans could be seen digging themselves in and actually withdrawing troops, these feints failed in their purpose. Quiescence in fact extended as far south as the Luce, so

¹ This is the name given by the French ; there is no battle name for this day in the British official nomenclature.

Sketch 10.

29TH MARCH.



REFERENCE.

Line 29th March..... British, French..... 30th March a.m..... British, French
 Army boundaries..... Corps boundaries.....

SCALE.
 Miles 10 0 10 20 Miles.

Prepared in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

that not only the Third Army but the Fifth—now represented by the XIX. Corps, comprising no less than eight divisions, a cavalry division and Carey's Force—was left more or less in peace.¹

During the afternoon the enemy entered a trench on a rise near Hamel, but a squadron of the 11th Hussars, in support of Carey's Force, rode up to within three hundred yards of the enemy, dismounted, fixed bayonets and walked up the slope. The Germans did not wait, but scurried off, and the line was restored. The 3rd Australian Division slightly improved its position in the angle between the Somme and the Ancre by establishing its line two hundred yards east of Marett Wood. The 4th Australian Brigade and the right of the 62nd Divn also gained a little ground near Rossignol Wood, where a sharp fight took place, as both sides happened to advance at the same time. North of the Scarpe, the 56th Division drove the Germans back nearly a mile for the purpose of salving ammunition and equipment; when this object was achieved it returned to its line. The weather was too bad for aircraft until the afternoon, when both sides made a few low-flying attacks. In addition the British dropped about three hundred bombs on troops and transport in the area just south of the Somme.

In the French area there was quiet along the Oise from Barisis to Noyon, on the front of the Sixth Army with which the British 58th Division (III. Corps) still remained. Opposite the Third Army, in front of Noyon as far as the region of Montdidier, the left wing of the German *Eighteenth Army* "accentuated the defensive attitude it had adopted on the "previous day";² but attempts of General Robillot's corps and the XXXV. Corps to advance were at once stopped by machine-gun fire. The V. Corps "continued in "a defensive attitude".³

Map 5.
Sketch
10.

It was only against the French First Army (General

¹ Major-General E. Feetham (39th Divn), an officer well known for his frequent visits to the front line of his division, was killed by a shell in Demuin, and Major-General N. Malcolm (66th Divn), wounded by another in Domart.

² The quotations in this portion are from F.O.A. vi. (i.), from which the narrative is taken.

³ A good deal of British artillery was still allotted to the French. That of the 14th Divn was withdrawn on the morning of this day; but that of the 8th, 20th, 30th, 36th and 61st Divns remained with the French Third and First Armies. Six heavy batteries of the III. Corps were with the French V. Corps, and all the heavy artillery of the XVIII. Corps with the Groupement Mesple.

Debeney) that the Germans were active.¹ This Army was still very weak. It consisted of only the VI. Corps (the battered 56th Divn, 5th Cavalry Divn and five battalions of the 12th Division) on an eight-mile front, and the Grouperment Mesple (133rd Divn, and three regiments of the 4th Cavalry Division, with the British 20th Divn, actually belonging to the XIX. Corps, in support behind its left). In rear, were the British 8th, 24th, 30th, 36th and 50th Divns withdrawn for rest. There were few reinforcements at hand: two battalions of the French 163rd Division began to arrive in lorries at Moreuil on the Avre from midday onwards, and three more battalions (one Territorial) of the 166th also in lorries, during the afternoon.²

The Germans remained quiet during the morning, and preparations were made by General Debeney to attack at 6 P.M. About noon,³ however, the enemy, under a heavy barrage, took the offensive on the front from La Neuville to Demuin against the Grouperment Mesple, which made "a large movement of withdrawal"; in fact, the French passed through the 59th and 61st Bdes (of the British 20th Divn) which were in support and were then themselves driven back, it being impossible to give them much artillery assistance, as the batteries were uncertain as to the position of the front line. A counter-attack by the 59th Bde, with the 60th Bde from reserve, which went forward at 4 P.M., reached Mézières, a fine performance for tired men; but eventually, when all of their few officers had been hit, the brigades were forced to retire. The withdrawal was covered on the left flank by the 50th Divn, formed into three composite battalions, which at 6 P.M. had been moved northwards in reserve to the 20th.⁴ The final position was that the 20th Divn, with the 50th behind it, held the left of Mesple's front from Moreuil Wood (exclusive) to Demuin, and thus protected the right of the XIX. Corps.

About 5 P.M. the French on the right of the 20th Divn were driven out of Moreuil Wood; so the 25th Bde,

¹ The attack was made by the XXV. Reserve Corps (3 divisions) and III. Corps (7 divisions) of the *Eighteenth Army*, and 2 divisions of the LI. Corps of the *Second Army*. No explanation so far has been offered for the small part played by the *Second Army*, which should have attacked on the whole of its front south of the Somme, but did no more than make one small raid near Hamel, mentioned above in the text.

² Two more battalions were with the divisional artillery near Grivesnes. See page 44.

³ This is the hour according to British records. F.O.A. says, 3 P.M.

⁴ In compliance with a XIX. Corps order issued at 11 P.M. the previous night and received at 5.30 A.M.

of the 8th Divn, which had been sent up to help them but was too weak to recapture it, took position about 8 P.M. on the high ground north of Moreuil, where it was later relieved by the 20th Divn. During the night the French reoccupied Moreuil Wood, but were driven out of it next morning.

When the VI. Corps, the right wing of the French First Army, advanced at 6 P.M. it was driven back with heavy casualties and lost ground to the depth of over two miles. Consequently on each wing of the First Army a pocket had been formed, and only a small section of its front was retained in the centre, behind the Avre, this being the line which the three battalions of the 166th Division had just reached.¹

To support the XIX. Corps,² the 24th Divn, resting near Castel on the Avre, was ordered in the afternoon to take up position to defend the passages at that place; the 18th Divn (of the III. Corps), less artillery, was embussed in the morning for Gentelles (7 miles E.S.E. of Amiens), where it began to arrive on the morning of the 30th. These two divisions on the evening of the 29th were ordered by Lieut.-General Watts to hold the new rear-line of defence, which the engineers of the XIX. Corps were organizing from near the junction of the Luce with the Avre in a northerly direction in front of Gentelles to the Somme. The 66th Divn, in its exposed position in front of Aubercourt, was brought back to the line of Carey's Force, and the 39th Divn was then withdrawn from this line into reserve. Other moves which took place on the 29th brought troops which had been on the right of the Fifth Army with the III. Corps to its left near Amiens: the 14th Divn (less artillery) was embussed at night and moved to an area five miles S.S.W. of Amiens; the 2nd Cavalry Divn (with the Canadian Cavalry Bde attached) marched to an area around Boves (4 miles south-east of Amiens); and the 3rd Cavalry Divn (less the Canadian Cavalry Bde), which had spent the 28th in the French Third Army area, to St. Remy (15 miles S.S.W. of Montdidier) en route for Amiens.

There was little for the higher commands to do but to

¹ The Avre, about 12 feet wide at Boves, flows through a valley bottom of marshes and market gardens (reached by boat).

² At 9 A.M. the field artillery of the corps was redistributed: 24th Divn artillery to cover the 20th Divn; the rest of the front to be divided between the artillery of the 8th, 50th, 66th, 39th and 16th Divns. This order, however, reached the 8th too late to be acted upon during the day, and its batteries remained with the French near Moreuil.

Map 6.
Sketch
10.

send forward what reinforcements they could and to keep up the supply of ammunition. At 5.40 P.M. to assist the hard pressed XIX. Corps, by order of G.H.Q., the 9th Australian Brigade (Br.-General C. Rosenthal) of the 3rd Australian Division, north of the Somme, was placed at Lieut.-General Watts's disposal, and ordered to Cachy (4 miles west of Marcelcave), to be used if necessary for counter-attack. It reached its destination at 4 A.M. on the 30th.¹ The Cavalry Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. T. McM. Kavanagh), also, whose 1st Division was already with the XIX. Corps, with the 2nd and 3rd moving towards it, was formally allotted to the Fifth Army. The 37th Division (Major-General H. Bruce Williams), which had begun its journey south from the Second Army on the 28th, was at 8.15 P.M. placed by General Byng at the disposal of the IV. Corps (Hébuterne sector). Farther north, arrangements were made for the 4th Canadian Division (Major-General Sir D. Watson), relieved on the night of the 28th/29th by the 46th Division, to take over the sector in front of Arras from the 56th Division: thus, the 4th and 3rd Canadian Divisions would be brought alongside each other, and command of them resumed by Lieut.-General Sir A. W. Currie of the Canadian Corps.²

Map 5.
Sketch
10.

Three French divisions were moving towards Debeney's Army. The 29th Division from Flanders began to detrain at Boves and Longueau (both stations south-east of Amiens) at 9 A.M. on the 29th; it was ordered to the Gentelles position behind the XIX. Corps. The 59th was due to begin detraining on the 30th at Breteuil and Gannes (11 miles west and 11 miles W.S.W. of Montdidier), with a view to being moved up behind the centre of the First Army. To the same destination was ordered the 127th Division, which began to detrain near Estrées St. Denis (15 miles south of Montdidier) on the evening of the 28th; it was brought on by lorries and arrived during the 30th. General Debeney, however, did not consider these reinforcements likely to be adequate for holding up an enemy offensive on his centre and right, and asked for two more. The 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division and the 162nd Division were placed at his disposal, and the former, in lorries, arrived

¹ It was replaced in the 3rd Australian Division by the 15th Australian Brigade of the 5th Australian Division, in reserve 5 miles north-west of Albert.

² The XIII. Corps headquarters (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle) was then to be withdrawn into reserve, with the 56th Division, and the 40th and 59th Divns from the Third Army under it.

at Tartigny (8 miles west of Montdidier) and the latter detrained at Maignelay (8 miles south of Montdidier) on the morning of the 30th.

General Pétain now began to take a more favourable view of the general situation, and cancelled the plan of operations issued on the 27th,¹ in which he had forecast the assembly of two Armies near Beauvais for the purpose of recovering Amiens, if the town were lost, by a counter-offensive. The gist of his new orders was "hold the present position at all costs, drive the enemy, as soon as possible, to a distance from Montdidier and Amiens, and, in any case, ensure liaison with the British Armies". General Fayolle's directive issued at 8 P.M. to the French First and Third Armies and to the British Fifth Army was "to restore order everywhere and remedy the dispersion of the troops which has been the natural consequence of the haste with which they have been engaged". Accordingly, the divisions whose regiments had been separated were to be reconstituted; the artillery was to be returned to its proper divisions; and the divisions were to be placed as soon as possible under their proper corps commanders.

The formation of a strong reserve force in the Amiens area still remained the basis of General Foch's plan; he was averse to sending more French troops to support or to relieve the Fifth Army, although General Pershing on this day placed his four divisions absolutely at his disposal.² As already mentioned, he met Sir Douglas Haig at Abbeville at 10.30 A.M. In explanation for not relieving the Fifth Army as far as the Somme, according to his original promise, he declared that it was impossible to relieve large formations in the midst of battle. He then prescribed, and the British Commander-in-Chief accepted that: first the troops then engaged should hold on where they stood, the Fifth Army, which was to be reorganized without leaving the battle, being made responsible for more ground, from the Luce—fixed as its southern boundary on the previous day—southwards to the line Mézières—Moreuil, this front to be defended "to the last extremity"; secondly, the reinforcements, as they came up, should be assembled in reserve.

These decisions General Foch himself communicated to General Rawlinson, commanding the Fifth Army. He again ordered General Pétain—the written note reaching the latter at 12.30 P.M.—to send to the Fifth Army as quickly as possible all the troops of the British III. Corps, including

¹ See page 39.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 362.

the 58th Divn, which was in the line of the Sixth Army ; and to arrange that the First Army should place a strong reserve behind its left, so that it could, if need be, assist the XIX. Corps. In the end, however, it was the left of the French First Army which received assistance from the British, who had already taken over the line down to Moreuil Wood.

H.M. the King had crossed over to France on the 28th and paid a visit to General Plumer and the Second Army. On the morning of the 29th he proceeded to G.H.Q. and saw the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Douglas Haig reported to him that the operations were now turning in favour of the Allies. He took the opportunity to point out that the strength of the British infantry in France at the beginning of the battle¹ had been about 100,000 less than it had been a year before ; that there were now three times as many Germans on the British front as there were in 1917 ; and that the British—by order of the Government—had extended their line to fully one-fifth more than its length had been in the previous autumn. Such a step, he said, might have been rendered necessary because the strength of the French Armies was becoming inadequate, while the Americans had not arrived except in small numbers ; but it had thinned the British front to a dangerous extent. Lastly, he had understood that the French Army which had been relieved by the British was to have remained in rear of the left flank of the French, ready to furnish support at the point of junction ; whereas its divisions had been dispersed.

The King subsequently visited the Royal Flying Corps and Third Army headquarters and a number of units and establishments. On the 30th, he went to the First Army area, returning to England in the afternoon.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 29TH MARCH

At midnight on the 28th/29th, on receipt of the formal O.H.L. orders to abandon the "Mars" attack, the *Seventeenth Army* gave instructions that the enemy must be led to imagine that the attack was to be continued. The artillery on the whole Army front was therefore to begin registering at 2 P.M., and on the 30th there were

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., Appendices, p. 33. The totals for the fighting troops are 1,192,668 on the 8th January 1917 and 1,097,906 on the 5th January 1918, of which 735,681 and 665,747 were infantry.

in addition to be bursts of fire ; but a great deal of artillery, and several divisions (two for the *Second Army*), were withdrawn from the front. The *Seventeenth Army*, therefore, reverted to ordinary trench warfare. "The results of its operations had been far behind expectation ; it had failed to 'pinch out' the Cambrai salient ; it had failed, in co-operation with the right of the *Second Army*, to break through the line Bapaume—Arras, and was never in a position to wheel north-west to roll up the British line. The result could not but exercise an unfavourable effect on the course of the whole spring offensive."

"Whilst the *Eighteenth Army*, on the 29th, in accordance with the directions which it had received, stopped its forward movement on by far the greater portion of its front, and indeed had to defend itself against counter-attacks ever increasing in vigour, its extreme right wing, in conjunction with the left wing of the *Second Army*, continued its operations in the direction of the Avre. The gain of ground was, however, trifling, it led only to the improvement of the front from Marcelcave to Plessier."¹

In the afternoon Ludendorff gave instructions for the further conduct of the operations : "the attack on Amiens south of the Somme and beyond the line Chauny—Noyon—Montdidier was to be continued with the left wing of the *Second Army*, the *Eighteenth Army* and the right wing of the *Seventh Army*. The rest of the *Second Army* and the *Seventeenth Army* also would later join in the attack north of the Somme, directly towards Amiens. Strong reserves should be pushed up behind the *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies* ; O.H.L. would send its reserves to that point, and the *Seventeenth Army* must give up additional troops to the *Second*."²

At 6 p.m. Ludendorff telephoned a new directive : "In spite of the exertions already imposed on the inner wings of the *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies*, the attack must be continued as far as the Noye [5 miles west of the Avre at Moreuil, which river it enters just above Boves]. Left wing of the *Second Army* must push forward with all its strength to the Amiens—St. Fuscien—Ailly road [this runs due south from Amiens, 1½ miles or more west of the Noye] ; right wing of the *Eighteenth* on la Faloise [on the Noye, 5 miles south of Ailly, above mentioned]."

Thus Ludendorff, in order to avoid giving the French time to make an orderly deployment, abandoned his plan whereby the *Eighteenth Army* should stand fast and not continue its advance until the *Second Army* had wheeled south-westwards and had reached Amiens and the lower Avre.³ The general direction of Amiens was, however, maintained, although it must have been obvious to him by this time that the operation which he required of the *Second Army* was, like that of the *Seventeenth*, beyond its powers.

In the autumn of 1914 Falkenhayn, under the compulsion of the Allied resistance, had gradually reduced the scope of his plans. Instead of a grand operation which he hoped would have led to the

¹ Foerster, p. 287.

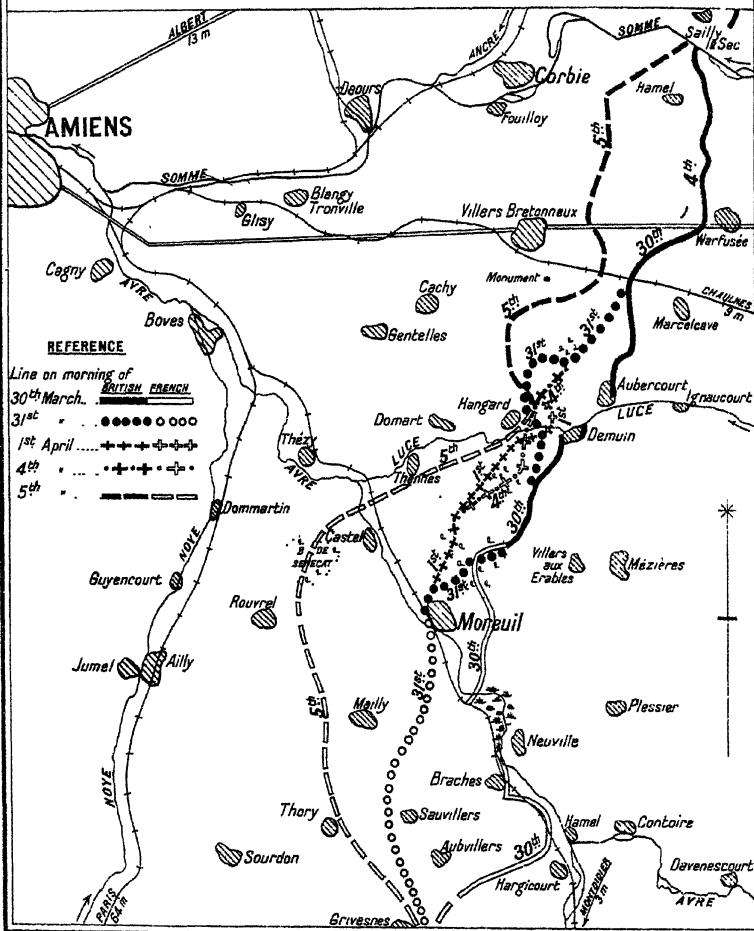
² Foerster, p. 288, states in a footnote that Crown Prince Rupprecht at once ordered 3 good fighting divisions from the *Seventeenth* to the *Second Army*, and that, in all, in the period 28th-30th March, 9 divisions (6 not yet engaged) were sent : 5 from the *Seventeenth*, one from the *Sixth* and 3 from O.H.L.

³ Foerster, p. 288.

Sketch 11.

IN FRONT OF AMIENS

30TH MARCH - 5TH APRIL.



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)
 3050/36

Ordnance Survey 1936.

Scale of Yards.



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CHAPTER V

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*continued*)

30TH MARCH 1918

THE BATTLE OF THE AVRE (*continued*)

(Maps 6, 7 ; Sketch 11)

"AMIENS is now the objective ; to secure that place all the efforts of this and the following days will be directed ; the attacks near Montdidier and eastward of that town are only diversions designed to detain enemy forces."¹ Thus does a German official writer open his chapter on the operations of Saturday the 30th March. His three sentences clearly reveal Ludendorff's change of policy.

East of the boundary between Hutier's *Eighteenth Army* Map 7. and Boehn's *Seventh Army*, near Noyon—coinciding with Sketch 11. the boundary between the G.A.N. and the G.A.R.—there was no action. But the first named resumed the offensive on its whole front, as far as Moreuil—now the boundary mark between the British and French, as well as between the German *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies*. The two left corps of Marwitz's *Second Army*, one division being north of the Somme, co-operated.

Rain fell at intervals throughout the day, which was followed by a wet night ; but as the ground, open corn-growing country, dotted with small villages and woods, had not previously been fought over, operations were not greatly influenced by the weather.

Opposite the V. Corps, the right of the French Third Army, the enemy, after severe fighting, suffered a complete check ; but the centre and left, Robillot's corps and the

¹ Goes, p. 169. Ludendorff says (p. 599) : " In the direction of Amiens the enemy's resistance seemed weaker. The original idea of the battle had to be modified, and the main weight of the attack vigorously directed on that point."

XXXV. Corps, were driven back two to three thousand yards, "the counter-attacks yielding little result". In the French First Army, against which the German southern thrust towards Amiens was made, the VI. Corps (56th Divn and 5th Cavalry Divn, five battalions of the 12th Division and six of the 166th) lost about a mile of ground on the right and in the centre, and nearly three miles on the left, being forced away from the Avre. The Groupement Mesple (4th Cavalry Division, 163rd Division—at first only three battalions, later six—and the 133rd Divn) similarly fell back some two miles on the right, losing the passages of the Avre at Braches, and abandoning Moreuil and Moreuil Wood.¹ Thus, the German advance between Montdidier and Moreuil, made by twelve divisions against, nominally, five French divisions and two cavalry divisions, penetrated two or three miles beyond the Rivière des Trois Doms and the Avre, and forced a gap, bounded by Moreuil town and Moreuil Wood, in the French line.

The northern half of the German thrust, made with eight (excluding the one north of the Somme) divisions in front line, against the British XIX. Corps (the fragments of five British divisions, part of the 1st Cavalry Divn and Carey's Force in front line), though bravely pressed, was less successful: the fine fighting spirit of the troops of the Fifth Army, in spite of their terrible experiences, was still maintained.² So only a small amount of ground to the depth of two thousand yards was lost by the British in the right centre near Demuin: the rest of the line held; further the British front was extended on the right to include the Moreuil sector which had been abandoned by the French.

The fight for Moreuil Wood deserves first mention. Throughout the night of the 29th/30th there had been considerable anxiety at XIX. Corps headquarters as to the situation in the French sector on the immediate right of the British line near this wood. As it stands at the western end of a long, low swell of ground, known as Moreuil ridge, which forms the southern boundary of the great Santerre

¹ In the evening, General Nollet took command of Mesple's troops as G.O.C. XXXVI. Corps.

² Under the XIX. Corps at this time were the remnants of 9 divisions (including two originally in the XVIII., one in the VII. and one in the III. Corps), the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divns, Carey's Force, and the 9th Australian Brigade.

plain, it formed an important tactical feature.¹ At 4.30 A.M. on the 30th a report was received by the XIX. Corps from the 20th Divn that under cover of a slight mist the enemy was dribbling men into the wood from the south-east. The French commanders, when appeal was made to them, were uncertain as to the situation—both Moreuil town and wood had in fact been evacuated by the French battalions occupying them, and the wood had been untenanted during most of the night. Lieut.-General Watts decided to take precautions to safeguard the point of junction between the Allies. He therefore ordered the 8th Divn (Major-General Heneker), which was resting west of Castel, to secure the passages over the Avre at that place, and the 24th Divn (Major-General A. C. Daly), which held a reserve position north of the 8th beyond the Luce, to hold the crossings over the latter river at Thennes and Berteaucourt, behind his right. At 7.15 A.M. he sent orders to the 2nd Cavalry Divn (Major-General T. T. Pitman), now near Boves (south-west of Amiens and some six miles from Moreuil Wood), to clear up the situation in the wood and secure the line as far as Moreuil without delay.

Major-General Pitman motored to his two brigades nearest to the wood, the 3rd and Canadian (Br.-Generals J. A. Bell-Smyth and J. E. B. Seely), and instructed them to hasten to the support of the infantry, to work in conjunction with each other, and to safeguard the line marked by the Moreuil—Demuin road, including Moreuil Wood whose eastern border runs along the road: whichever brigade arrived first should make straight for the high ground north-west of the wood. The Canadian Cavalry Bde was already saddled up, had the shorter distance to go, and moved quickly. It was spurred on by alarming news imparted to Br.-General Seely at the cross roads near Castel by a French general, who said that the Germans were advancing in overwhelming force and that he had sent orders for his troops to fall back across the Avre: indeed, they had already done so, for the Germans had moved to the attack of the Allied line south of the Somme at 8 A.M.

¹ The wood, composed mostly of ash trees, not yet in leaf, with saplings and thick undergrowth difficult to ride through, was pear-shaped. A mile and a quarter from north to south, and nearly a mile wide in the north, it tapered southward towards Moreuil town, from which it was separated by half a mile of sloping ground. It had a detached outlying portion on its north-western face.

By 9.30 A.M., as the Canadians approached the wood, there was considerable fire from the northern face; but on the western side—from which the Germans could see the smoke of Amiens—the slope of the ground permitted a defiladed advance up to about two hundred yards from the edge. The Royal Canadian Dragoons were sent mounted against the south-west and north-west corners, whilst Lord Strathcona's Horse, supported by four machine guns placed in the unoccupied detached portion of the wood, attacked with two squadrons dismounted against the north face and with one mounted against the north-east corner. This squadron charged through a line of guns, and some of the survivors entered the wood from the east; ¹ the other squadrons had succeeded earlier in breaking in, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting ensued. The Germans stood well, even advanced with the bayonet; but, with British airmen assisting the attack, they were gradually forced to give ground. The Fort Garry Horse and a squadron of the 4th Hussars (3rd Cavalry Bde) reinforced, and by 11 A.M. the whole of the northern part of the wood was in Canadian hands.

The southern half was still held by the Germans, and Br.-General Seely's men, weakened by severe casualties, were hard pressed, when the 3rd Cavalry Bde, which had now arrived, came in on the right flank with the rest of the 4th Hussars and the 16th Lancers, and later with the 5th Lancers. About 3 P.M. a dismounted advance was made by the 4th Hussars and 16th Lancers, assisted by a hundred men representing the 2/West Yorkshire (8th Divn), who had been sent up; and the wood was then cleared to the eastern edge. Losses had been heavy and the line was now so thin that a German counter-attack soon after 4 P.M. regained the southern end. Finally, at night, the line ran diagonally across the wood from north-east to south-west, and thence down to the railway station on the western outskirts of Moreuil.² Here, by order of Lieut.-General Watts, the 24th and 23rd Bdes of the 8th Divn, the infantry of which was organized as three battalions under Br.-General G. W. St. G. Grogan, relieved the cavalry, which then withdrew, leaving the 5th Lancers in support. The Allied boundary, first fixed as the Somme, then as the

¹ Lieut. G. M. Flowerdew, who commanded this squadron, died of wounds and was posthumously awarded a V.C.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 377, states "at the end of the day, after desperate street fighting, parties of French and British, in spite of energetic counter-attacks, held the north part of Moreuil".

Luce, then as the northern end of Moreuil Wood, was now the Avre.¹

North of Moreuil Wood, the Germans had advanced about 8 A.M. heralded by low-flying squadrons, after an eighty minutes' bombardment. Entering the wood, then unoccupied, they had turned the flank of the 20th Divn, which had all three brigades, 60th, 59th and 61st, organized as battalions, in the front line, a few men of the French 133rd Divn being mixed with them. The weaker 50th Divn was in support. The 60th Bde was forced back, and by 2 P.M. the 59th followed, thereby losing even Rifle Wood, which was situated on the slopes behind the position that fall to the Luce. A counter-attack of 20th and 50th Divn troops about 3 P.M. recaptured both Rifle and Little Woods in the old front line; but at 4 P.M. the enemy retook Little Wood and entered Rifle Wood, only to be ejected from the latter. A final counter-attack at 7 P.M., supported by I. Battery R.H.A., and two batteries of Canadian horse artillery, four field batteries and two heavy batteries, entirely recovered the old line, capturing men and machine guns of the German *208th Division*, and re-establishing touch with the 8th Divn troops in Moreuil Wood.

North of the Luce, the old right sector of Carey's Force was now held by the 66th and 61st Divns (Br.-General A. J. Hunter in temporary command vice Major-General Malcolm, wounded, and Major-General C. J. Mackenzie), some of Carey's men mixed amongst them, with the 39th Divn (temporarily under Br.-General W. G. Thompson, vice Major-General Feetham, killed) in support. Owing to the lie of the ground, the line was here slightly in advance of

¹ General Foch himself wrote a letter to Br.-General Seely (now Major-General Lord Mottistone), to be communicated to the survivors of the Canadian Cavalry Bde, in which he said: "En grande partie, grâce à elle, "la situation, angoissante au début de la bataille, était rétablie".

There is a lengthy account of the fighting in Moreuil Wood in Zimmermann's "*Die englische Kavallerie in Frankreich in März und April 1918*", and in the history of the *122nd Fusilier Regt. (243rd Division)*, which, reinforced by a battalion of the *101st Grenadier Regt. (23rd Division)*, was in the wood. It agrees with the British account. The *243rd Division* was attacked by airmen whilst marching up in the morning, and found the *101st* expecting a tank attack. The battery charged was a 15 cm.-gun battery (Zimmermann says a heavy howitzer, which was on the road, and a trench-mortar section), brought up to protect the right flank. The *122nd* put in its last man, including regimental staff and details. The counter-attack seems to have been made by the *353rd Regiment* of the *88th Division*. Moreuil town had been captured by the *23rd Division* in the morning. There was considerable confusion among the German divisions, the right regiment of the *23rd Division* and the left of the *243rd Division* fighting on the fronts of the *50th* and *88th Divisions*.

the line on the southern bank ; so from the high ground on that bank and from Demuin, the Germans were able to enfilade the 66th Divn. They ultimately forced it to fall back towards Hangard, Bois de Hangard and Lancer Wood on the next of the spurs running into the Luce valley, where the infantry of the 39th Divn was already dug in. Demuin was almost at once retaken by a counter-attack of Little's composite battalion, and this for a time afforded some relief. As the men of the 66th Divn were seen retiring, two counter-attacks were organized in the 39th Divn, one by the brigade-majors of the 116th and 117th Bdes, and the other by Br.-General G. A. Armytage (117th Bde). These were made soon after 1 P.M., and at first progressed well. Both parties advanced some five hundred yards, but they could not hold the ground gained and had to fall back, so Colonel Little was ordered to withdraw from Demuin.

The 61st Divn, next on the north, was heavily shelled, but it was not attacked by infantry ; its right, as well as the left of the 20th Divn, south of the Luce, conformed to the retirement of the 66th Divn by swinging back so as to maintain touch.

After ten days' continuous fighting the 66th, 61st and 39th Divns were not only very weak in numbers, but all ranks remaining were thoroughly worn out. Fearing the risk of leaving these weary troops to face powerful attacks without fresh support, Lieut.-General Watts sent orders at 12.30 P.M. through the 61st Divn for the 9th Australian Brigade (four battalions) in reserve at Cachy to counter-attack and retake Aubercourt and the ground which had been lost. Unfortunately this movement was arranged too late to coincide with the efforts of the three divisions concerned. It was not until 2 P.M., an hour after its own counter-attack, that the 39th Divn heard of it, and 2.10 P.M. before Br.-General C. Rosenthal was able to give verbal orders for the 33rd Australian Battalion, with the 34th in support, to advance on a 3,000-yard front, with its right on Aubercourt. The 2nd Cavalry Divn, which in the morning had moved up the 4th and 5th Cavalry Bdes, in support of Carey's Force, to the woods north of the Australians, provided the 12th Lancers to protect the left flank of the counter-attack.

By 4.30 P.M. the 33rd was assembled a couple of miles east of Cachy, and at 5 P.M. it advanced south-eastward. In the meantime, the 12th Lancers, under Lieut.-Colonel C. Fane, galloping forward in successive lines of squadrons,

had gone on, and, after close fighting, occupied the wood henceforward known as Lancer Wood,¹ north of which the 183rd Bde was still holding on. The 33rd Australian Battalion followed and passed through the wood, but was unable to advance more than two hundred yards beyond it. Towards 8 P.M. the companies of the 34th Battalion were put into various gaps in the very widely extended line of the 33rd. On the left, one of them attacked and carried the former trench-line of the 39th Divn in which the enemy had just established himself. The rest of the line, however, was too thin to make contact with it there, and it had to be withdrawn. The strength of the Germans (the *19th* and *Guard Ersatz Divisions*) was too great to admit of further progress on so wide a front of attack, and Aubercourt remained in the enemy's hands. The moral effect on the tired infantry of the appearance of the cavalry and of fresh, strong battalions of Australians, however, had been very great and all alarm for the safety of the line was instantly allayed.

Hearing about 2 P.M. that the Australians were to counter-attack, Br.-General A. J. Hunter, with a view to assisting them, had ordered an advance of the 66th Divn to retake Aubercourt and recover the line from the south. This movement was carried out at 3 P.M., before the Australians came into sight, by the remnants of several different battalions, men of a field survey company R.E., and others untrained in infantry work, under Br.-General G. C. Williams. With good artillery support, they actually gained some fifteen hundred yards; but, being enfiladed from heights on the right and finding no cover on the forward slopes they had reached, they had to fall back, and the Germans then occupied the Aubercourt spur.

A slow bombardment was begun by the enemy at 8 A.M., to the north of the 66th, 61st and 39th Divns, against the centre and left of Carey's line, held by regiments of the 1st Cavalry Divn, the 16th Divn and Carey's Force. No infantry attack followed until 1 P.M., when the *4th Guard* and *228th Divisions* advanced between the Roman road and the Somme. The Germans were everywhere repulsed except in front of Hamel, where they entered the trenches, only to be thrown out by a counter-attack of the 5th Dragoon Guards and 16th Divn engineers and pioneers. They attacked again about 4 P.M. near the Roman road, but were again repulsed.

¹ It received this name at the suggestion of the Australian commander.

Thus, on the 30th March, the XIX. Corps had held its own except just close to the Luce, where Demuin and Aubercourt were lost, causing a dent in the right centre: it had actually extended its right as far as Moreuil, so as to cover ground vacated by the French.

Truly the survivors of the Fifth Army, who were still holding a 19-mile front, deserved well of their country. Far from being swept away and destroyed by the onslaught of three or four times their numbers, the XVIII. and XIX. Corps, now united under the command of Lieut.-General Watts, and the VII. Corps, now under the Third Army north of the Somme, had, with little reinforcement, not only brought the Germans to a standstill, but after ten days' heavy fighting were still in the line. In the fourth corps of the Fifth Army, the III., the 58th Divn and most of the corps artillery were still fighting on the front of the French Sixth Army; while its other two divisions, the 18th and 14th, were leaving the French to join the XIX. Corps, and came into action again with the XIX. Corps on the 4th/5th April.

To review the situation on this day of the other corps and divisions which were originally in the Fifth Army, or which joined it early in the battle:

Cavalry Corps: 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divns. All still in the battle.

XVIII. Corps: 20th, 30th and 61st Divns still in action under XIX. Corps; 36th (Ulster) Divn, artillery still in action, the remainder of the troops, reduced to a mere cadre, withdrawn on the morning of the 30th March (by rail) to refit.

XIX. Corps: 8th, 24th, 50th and 66th Divns still in action.

VII. Corps (transferred to Third Army on the 25th): 16th and 39th Divns transferred to XIX. Corps, still in action; 35th, still in action; 9th and 21st, relieved on the 28th by the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions.

Thus, of the three cavalry divisions and sixteen other divisions, only one division, and that the division which had fought hardest and lost most heavily, had been withdrawn from the battle. It is comprehensible therefore why the Fifth Army has always resented the legend that on the 26th March it was annihilated; "no longer really exists; it is broken".¹

¹ "1918" Vol. I., p. 541.

During the day Lieut.-General Watts issued two orders as regards reliefs and the holding of the line. At 12.20 P.M. the 53rd and 55th Bdes of the 18th Divn (Major-General R. P. Lee, from the III. Corps, formerly the right of the Fifth Army),¹ which had arrived at the Gentelles rear line, were directed to take over the fronts of the 66th, 39th and 61st Divns (including the Australian portion) at night. This was done, a single battalion of the French 29th Division, the main body of which had reached Boves, appearing in support at Hangard.²

Later, after a warning message, the 61st Divn was ordered to man the sector immediately to the south of the Roman road. Major-General C. J. Mackenzie used the 35th Australian Battalion (9th Australian Brigade) for this purpose; but the relief was not quite completed by daylight. Carey's Force, as such, now disappeared; but, with infantrymen of the 16th Divn and cavalry units interspersed and commanded by Lieut.-Colonel F. H. D. C. Whitmore, 10th Hussars, it now became known as "Whitmore's Cosmopolitan Force". It continued to hold the sector from the Roman road to the Somme until the 5th April, when its troops were sent back to their own formations. This sector passed at 5 A.M. on the 31st to the command of the 1st Cavalry Divn.

Under orders of the C.R.A. XIX. Corps (Br.-General W. B. R. Sandys), the field artillery had been allotted to cover definite sectors of the front, regardless of the particular troops engaged therein. The heavy artillery (100 guns, 69 in action) allotted to divisional sectors was continually in action during the day. Warfusée Abancourt was bombarded in the morning. Later, after Aubercourt was lost, every gun had been turned on to this village. In the evening, Wiencourt (east of Marcelcave) station, where enemy troops were seen detraining, was shelled.³

The air forces were mostly concentrated on the Luce valley sector, where the three corps squadrons dropped 109 bombs and fired 17,000 rounds. The headquarter squadrons

¹ The third, the 54th Bde, arrived at Boves in the evening.

² "The main body of the 29th Division [less artillery, which had not yet detrained] remained in [First] Army reserve in the area south of "Boves. . . . The two leading battalions were established in reserve at "Thennes and Hangard in the afternoon." F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 385 and Annexe No. 1180.

³ The field artillery of the 20th, 30th and 36th Divns was still with the French on the right of the British; six heavy batteries with the [French] V. Corps; and the heavy artillery of the XVIII. Corps with the [French] VI. Corps.

bombed the villages in enemy hands and made low-flying attacks on the roads: the weather was too stormy for night bombing.

Map 6. To the north of the Somme the Germans made determined but unsuccessful attacks, offering fine targets to the defenders, against various portions of the Third Army front, particularly the 3rd Australian Division and Guards Divn. The British actually improved their position in various small ways: at the time it was said that, simultaneously with the arrival of the Australians and New Zealanders, as a result of the heavy losses inflicted by the Fifth and Third Armies the initiative had passed out of the hands of the enemy.

In the VII. Corps area, shortly after 9 A.M., enemy artillery and infantry could be seen moving in the Somme valley. They were shelled by the guns of the 1st Cavalry Divn (Major-General R. L. Mullens) south of the river and those of the 3rd Australian Division (Major-General Sir J. Monash) north of it, drawing a reply from the German artillery. At midday, the trenches of the Australians were heavily barraged, and a quarter of an hour later the German infantry, in many lines, attacked both the 11th Australian Brigade and the extreme right of the 10th, but were stopped by fire, with severe losses. A second attack was launched about 1 P.M. and a third at 2.30 P.M., both of which similarly failed. For hours afterwards small parties of Germans could be seen at intervals trying to make their way back to Morlancourt; in every case, the artillery quickly picked up targets and inflicted further casualties.¹

On the rest of the VII. Corps front, except for shelling, the day passed quietly. In the evening, orders were issued for the relief of the 35th Divn by the extension of the inner flanks of the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions, and this move was completed during the night. Thus an Australian Corps sector (under Lieut.-General Birdwood) was again formed. Headlam's Force, with McCulloch's under it, containing most of the infantry of the 21st Divn,² was relieved by the 3rd Australian Division, and sent back to its divisional headquarters, 4 miles north-east of Amiens.

In front of the IV. Corps, the enemy showed consider-

¹ The attack against the 11th Australian Brigade was made by the 228th Division, not previously engaged, and the 18th, in action since the 21st; that against the 10th by the 13th Division, originally in 2nd line, but in action since the 24th.

² See "1918" Vol. I.

able machine-gun, sniper and patrol activity. At 2 P.M. the New Zealand Division began carrying out an operation, planned on the previous day, in order to advance the line east of Colincamps about five hundred yards and obtain better observation. Some of the Germans were taken by surprise, but others offered strong resistance, so that, on the left, the operation was not completed until early in the morning of the 31st. The German losses were heavy; at one post 190 dead were counted, while the captures included 3 officers, 287 other ranks, 110 machine guns and 15 trench mortars.

The right and left divisions of the VI. Corps passed a quiet day, but the Guards Divn, in the centre, had to sustain the heaviest attack made upon it since it went into the line, the enemy, no doubt, hoping to cut off the troops holding the projecting spur at Boiry Becquerelle between the branches of the Cojeul stream.

At 8 A.M. a heavy bombardment was opened on the 3rd Guards Bde, and it soon spread southwards to include the 1st. Shortly after 10 A.M. when a British barrage was dropped on the attackers, as it was seen they were deployed and ready to advance, the Germans increased the rate of their gun fire. Three-quarters of an hour later, their infantry (*234th Division*), with packs on, advanced against the 3rd Guards Bde (1/Grenadier and 1/Welsh Guards), under cover of a barrage provided by machine guns and fourteen aeroplanes dropping bombs. They were everywhere stopped by devastating fire before reaching the outer belt of wire, except at one spot where fifty broke in, but were dealt with by immediate counter-attack. The 1st Guards Bde (2/Grenadier Guards) was similarly successful, although, when a second attack was made upon it, a few Germans gained a footing in the line. These intruders were likewise overwhelmed by counter-attack.

During the nights of the 30th/31st and 31st/1st April, the 97th Brigade (32nd Division) relieved most of the 31st Divn, which had been in action since the 24th.

The enemy opposite the XVII. Corps, except north of the Scarpe, where there was some bombing, confined himself to artillery fire, which at times became heavy. In reply, German back areas and roads were severely shelled. The 10th Brigade (4th Division), south of the Scarpe, advanced its line a further four hundred yards without opposition.

No operation orders of importance were issued except

as regards reliefs. Sir Douglas Haig visited General Rawlinson at Dury (2 miles south of Amiens), where the old Fourth Army Staff was engaged in taking over from the Fifth Army. There he met M. Clemenceau, and obtained a promise from him that orders should be issued for the French First Army to re-cross the Avre and take over the ground which the 3rd and Canadian Cavalry Bdes had recovered after its evacuation by the French. The Commander-in-Chief pointed out the necessity for the French making a greater effort, and urged that the British should be relieved up to Hangard. M. Clemenceau said that he would put pressure on General Foch to do everything possible to meet the Field-Marshal's wishes. As a result the French did in the following days take over the front from Moreuil to Hangard (inclusive). Sir Douglas Haig subsequently went to Beauquesne (13 miles N.N.E. of Amiens), where Third Army headquarters were established. He found that General Byng regarded the situation as entirely satisfactory.

General Foch, too, "in spite of the violent enemy offensive during the day, considered that the battle was now "going well". He maintained the instructions already given for the defensive operations, and, in view of the possibility of passing to the offensive, issued the following General Directive No. 1 :¹

"In order to co-ordinate the operations of the British and French Armies at the point which they have now reached, the following directions are given :

"The task of the Allied Armies in the present battle remains first of all to check the enemy, whilst maintaining close touch between the British and French Armies, notably by the possession and then the free use of Amiens.

"This result is to be attained :

"1. By the organization and maintenance of a strong defensive front on the positions now held.

"The Armies must secure this object with the troops at present at their disposal. For the moment, there can be no question of relieving large formations ; this would play the enemy's game by leading to a battle

¹ General Foch exercised his command by three forms of written communications : "Notes", which were sometimes orders and sometimes of the nature of an expression of wishes ; "Directives", which we should call "Instructions" ; and "General Directives", dealing with general strategy.

" of attrition and preventing the formation of a mass of
" manœuvre.

" 2. By the formation of strong reserves of manœuvre,
" intended to meet the enemy attacks or to take the offen-
" sive. These reserves will be formed :

" North of Amiens by the British forces ; north or
" north-west of Beauvais (west of the line Beauvais—
" Crèvecœur—Poix) by the French forces.¹

" It is therefore in the latter area that the staff of the
" French reserves must be organized, and that the arrival
" of the troops by road and rail will be regulated.

" Heavy calls must be made without hesitation on the
" fronts not attacked in order to make this mass of man-
" œuvre as strong as possible and to constitute it with the
" utmost rapidity. Measures will be taken accordingly.

" The Commanders-in-Chief are requested to report the
" measures which they take in compliance, as soon as they
" have decided upon them."

General Pétain thereupon ordered the assembly near Beauvais of a Fifth Army of twenty divisions, including one American division and four French divisions from Italy, the remainder being drawn from the G.A.E. and G.A.C. He also directed four fresh divisions (15th, 45th, 169th and 2nd Dismounted Cavalry) to be transferred from the general reserve to the G.A.R., and reported that the possibility of returning the British 58th Divn, still with the French Sixth Army, was being considered. General Pétain also issued special instructions to the G.A.N. and G.A.R. as to the reconnaissance work of their air squadrons, and for the construction of rear positions.

Of the divisions actually arriving, General Debeney (First Army) directed the 29th to ensure the liaison of the British and French ; he retained in reserve, the 59th (beginning to detrain at Breteuil, 11 miles west of Montdidier, on the morning of the 30th) and the 17th (detraining on the night of the 30th/31st at Crèvecœur, in an area 20 to 30 miles S.S.W. of Amiens)² ; the 45th (which arrived in lorries in an area 7 miles west of Montdidier) was placed in reserve behind the centre. General Humbert (Third Army) ordered the 169th Division (which arrived during the day

¹ Poix is about 20 miles south-west of Amiens, and the line named runs south from Poix.

² In the short history of the 17th Division, it is stated that its transfer from the Eighth Army, when working on the 2nd Position along the Grand Couronné, Nancy, to the First Army, was begun on 27th March ; but the order for the transfer cannot be found in F.O.A. vi. (i.).

at Ressons, 11 miles south-east of Montdidier) to move up behind his left.

On the 30th, after his return to Buckingham Palace, the King addressed a letter to Sir Douglas Haig, which was subsequently issued as a Special Order of the Day :

“ My short visit to the Battle Front gave me an exceptional opportunity of seeing you and some of your generals engaged in the fierce battle still raging, and I thus obtained personal testimony to the indomitable courage and unflinching tenacity with which my splendid troops have withstood the supreme effort of the greater part of the enemy’s fighting power.

“ I was also fortunate enough to see some units recently withdrawn from the front line, and listened with wonder as officers and men narrated the thrilling incidents of a week’s stubborn fighting.

“ I was present at the entraining of fresh troops eager to reinforce their comrades.

* * * *

“ With these experiences, short but varied, I feel that the whole Empire will join me in expressing the gratitude due to you and your Army for the skilful, unswerving manner in which this formidable attack has been, and continues to be, dealt with.

* * * *

“ We at home must ensure that the Man Power is adequately maintained. . . . Thus may you be relieved from any anxiety.”

* * * *

In another Special Order of the Day, Sir D. Haig informed the troops of a telegram from President Wilson :

“ May I not express to you my warm admiration of the splendid steadfastness and valor with which your troops have withstood the German onslaught and the perfect confidence that all Americans feel that you will win a secure and final victory.”

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 30TH MARCH

“ The attack of the 30th March placed the extreme left wing of the *Second Army* in possession of Demuin and the passage [under

"close fire] of the Avre at Moreuil. Further north, the fighting was without effect. . . . The results of the day were widely behind expectations."¹

The various regimental accounts ascribe the failure to insufficient preparation, lack of effective artillery support due to shortage of ammunition—which was not evident—and the fire power of the British, who were so well hidden that their machine guns could not be spotted and knocked out. One account ("Regt. No. 86" of the *18th Division*) admits that "the power of attack was exhausted. Spirits sank to zero. The division suffered a reverse the like of which it had not yet experienced."

¹ Foerster, p. 288.

CHAPTER VI

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*continued*)

31ST MARCH 1918

THE BATTLE OF THE AVRE (*concluded*)

(Maps 6, 8 ; Sketch 11)

Map 8.
Sketch
11.

THE failure of the offensive of the 28th March against Arras, designed to set the German Armies on the move once more, as well as the meagre progress made in the direction of Amiens on the 29th and 30th, exercised a decisive influence on the operations of the following days. The course of events caused Ludendorff to postpone further serious operations until the 4th April, in order to allow time for rest and preparation.¹ Easter Sunday, the 31st March, was cold and showery, with bright intervals, and little happened before the afternoon. Several small local holding attacks were then made by the *Eighteenth Army* against the French First Army, whilst four divisions of the *Second Army* (one of them, the *199th*, fresh) straightened out the re-entrant in the German front between Moreuil and the Luce, thus pressing back the survivors of the 8th, 20th and 50th Divns, and again obtaining possession of Moreuil Wood, Little Wood and Rifle Wood.

"During the night of the 30th/31st, at the junction of "the French First Army and British Fifth Army, small "French parties (*éléments légers*) reoccupied Moreuil, which "patrols had found evacuated by the Germans."²

In the areas of the French Third and First Armies (14 divisions faced by 12 German divisions), shelling began at 7 A.M., while from midday onwards a few local attacks took place against various villages, particularly Le Montchel

¹ See Note at end of Chapter, "The Germans on the 31st March", which might be read now.

² F.O.A. vi. (i). p. 387.

(south of Montdidier), Grivesnes, Sauvillers, and Mailly Raineval, all in the French First Army area. The Germans secured a footing in the two former places; they also recaptured Moreuil, but lost it again. A small attack—apparently with the purpose of forming a bridgehead over the Oise—was launched against Chauny in the French Sixth Army area, and this fell on the 16th Entrenching Battalion of the British 58th Divn, which was still retained in the line by the French.¹ Here about 5.30 P.M. some parties of the *251st Reserve Regiment* managed to cross the Oise on rafts, but they were dealt with by a counter-attack, and all killed or captured.

The only serious attack was that made between Moreuil and the Luce, against the right of the XIX. Corps. Here after an hour's bombardment, the *243rd Division* advanced against Moreuil Wood, with the result that the left of the 24th Bde (Br.-General R. Haig) and all the 23rd Bde (Br.-General G. W. St. G. Grogan) were driven out of it. Br.-General J. A. Bell-Smyth, seeing the infantry retiring, led up the 3rd Cavalry Bde, and sent the 5th Lancers in advance at a gallop to bar the enemy's progress. The regiment took position on the higher ground north-west of the wood, where the 20th Divn reinforced it with the 6/Shropshire L.I. and the 11/Durham L.I. (Pioneers). After one attempt to push forward, the Germans retired into the wood. Major-General Heneker (8th Divn) then sent up Br.-General Coffin's 25th Bde (some 200 strong) to counter-attack, and about 4 P.M. it managed to reach the extreme north-west corner of Moreuil Wood, which was separated from the main portion by a clear space of 25 yards. A line was then established to connect the 24th Bde, swung back to form a defensive flank, with the 3rd Cavalry Bde.

Farther north, also at 1 P.M., between the wood and the Luce, the *199th* and *208th Divisions* advanced² against the sector held by the 20th Divn, part of the 50th Divn and some troops of the French 133rd Divn, but the latter soon fell back.³ About 2.30 P.M., the right of the 20th Divn enfiladed from Moreuil Wood now in German hands, began to withdraw. This movement spread to the left, and it

¹ The artillery of the 20th and 30th Divns and four heavy batteries of the III. Corps and the four heavy brigades of the XVIII. Corps (one withdrawn at night) were still covering the French troops. The artillery of the 36th Divn was withdrawn this day and marched to Poix to refit.

² Their orders were to drive the British across the Luce.

³ This led to a report that the battalion of the French 29th Division in Hangard had retired; which was not the case.

was then that both Little Wood and Rifle Wood were lost ; but this was the limit of the German success. The 4th Cavalry Bde (Lieut.-Colonel S. R. Kirby) was moved up, one of its regiments, the Carabiniers, filling a gap and connecting with the 3rd Cavalry Bde. A line was then established west of the woods, some French troops (part of a battalion of the 29th Division) coming into it between the Carabiniers and the 61st Brigade. The enemy's short advance, however, had brought him within reach of the crossings of the Luce. Orders, therefore, were given for a counter-attack next day, and by dawn the dismounted contingents of the 4th, 5th and Canadian Cavalry Bdes were assembled in the Luce valley, ready to advance at 9 A.M., with the 3rd Cavalry Bde in support.

Between the Luce and the Somme there was no infantry attack, but the opposing artilleries were busy all day.

In the course of the 31st, the 39th Divn (less artillery, which remained in the line near Villers Bretonneux) was withdrawn and assembled at Longueau (south-east of Amiens), the last troops reaching that place late in the afternoon.¹

Some internal reliefs took place during the night. Such troops of the 61st Divn and 1st Cavalry Divn as still remained in the line of the 35th Australian Battalion, owing to the relief of their formations not having been quite completed on the previous night, and the part of Whitmore's "Cosmopolitan Force" still south of the Roman road, were withdrawn; and between the Luce and the Roman road command passed from the G.O.C. 61st to the G.O.C. 18th Divn.

Map 6. North of the Somme, the Third Army, except for shelling, had a quiet day ; there was no German attack. In the V. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe) the 7/East Yorkshire of the 50th Bde at 5.30 A.M., with the aid of four whippet tanks—which, by corps orders, were timed to reach the objective after the infantry, in order to deal with machine-gun nests—made an unsuccessful attempt to recover the posts lost west of Aveluy on the 29th. The objectives were reached, but could not be retained. One tank failed to start owing to engine trouble, another was damaged, and a third stuck ; the machine which reached

¹ To assist in guiding the troops to Longueau, all the roads were piqueted. When the men arrived, they were given a hot meal and sorted out into units and billeted in the village. During the night, they were moved by lorry to villages south-west of Amiens.

For the losses of the 39th Divn see Chapter XXV., Note I.

the objective had to be abandoned. In the IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir G. M. Harper), men of the 4th Australian Brigade, in a bombing attack, captured a German document giving the orders for the relief of the troops in the vicinity of Bucquoy and the instructions for the sorting out of the thoroughly disorganized divisions. Given this information, artillery and machine guns were able to bring heavy and effective fire on the parts of the line where reliefs were taking place. In the XVII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Ferguson), south of the Scarpe, the 10th Brigade (4th Division) pushed forward another four hundred yards, without encountering much opposition, and then maintained its gains in spite of counter-attack and concentrated bombardment.

Various reliefs took place during the night : a brigade of the 37th Division began taking over from the 62nd Divn, the operation being completed on the following night ; the 32nd Division completed the relief of the 31st Divn, while the 2nd Canadian Division extended southward so as to take over a thousand yards of the frontage held by the Guards Divn.

The 31st was marked by the partial return of the air forces to the upper air ; there was a resumption of the customary bombing and fighting flights in normal formations. In the Luce sector, bombing and shooting on German troops continued. Large enemy air formations appeared over the battlefield only intermittently ; there were no collisions with them, and no more than three decisive combats. Many of the fighter pilots, finding no aeroplanes to attack, again turned their attention to ground targets.

G.H.Q. issued orders allotting the 57th Division (First Army) to the Third Army, and for the 9th, 21st and 41st Divns to be transferred to the Second Army. Between the Somme and Arras, G.H.Q. now had only the 5th Australian Division in general reserve. General Byng therefore objected to giving up tired divisions, relieved by exchanges, to other Armies, and the Chief of the General Staff, Sir H. Lawrence, was sent to make clear to him the necessity for this course in order to hold the line elsewhere. The Adjutant-General, Sir G. H. Fowke, reported to the Commander-in-Chief that the losses to date had been 116,000 infantry and 8,000 machine gunners, and that in all 73,000 wounded and 19,000 sick had been evacuated.¹ The state

¹ The total casualties are dealt with in Chapter XXV.

of infantry reinforcements was shown to be as follows :

In base dépôts	18,625
Arrived from England, 27th March to midnight 31st March/1st April	26,384
Left England, but not yet arrived at bases	5,316
Due to leave England on 1st April	21,651
Date of sailing uncertain	31,649
	<hr/>
	103,625

During the day, General Foch informed Sir Douglas Haig by letter that "The French Army, still engaged in a violent battle, cannot for the moment extend beyond the vicinity of the road Amiens—Roye". This meant that the British must still hold the front line as far as the Luce, which stream is crossed by that road at Hangard : actually at this time, as we know, the British line extended further south, to Moreuil. General Foch also objected to the worn 24th, 39th, 50th, 61st, 63rd and 66th Divns being withdrawn to be reconstituted, as they formed a useful reserve.

Further reinforcements reached the French First Army : the 152nd Division began to detrain at St. Just (10 miles S.S.W. of Montdidier) and stations south of it ; and the 17th at Conty (17 miles west of Moreuil) and stations down to Crèvecœur (10 miles south of Conty). These two divisions General Debeney decided to hold in reserve. At night he issued the order : "La journée a été bonne. Organisez-vous." General Humbert directed the troops of the Third Army to remain on the defensive.¹

What the enemy would do next was yet uncertain. There was complete calm in the Vosges and in Lorraine ; there seemed no danger of attack at Verdun or in Champagne ; but there were plenty of signs that the battle would be continued between the Oise and the sea. Two sectors seemed to be threatened : Arras, towards which there was a good deal of train transport ; and the Avre, where the enemy had considerable reserves and had not yet ceased to press.

¹ A table in F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 394, shows that the G.A.R. on 31st March had 13 divisions and one cavalry division in the line ; 14 divisions and 4 cavalry divisions in reserve of the Third and First Armies or of the G.A.R. ; 5 divisions at the disposal of G.Q.G. detraining ; with 204 field batteries, 132 heavy batteries and 75 aeroplane squadrons.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 31ST MARCH

During the evening of the 30th, in view of the failure of the *Seventeenth Army* to capture Arras, Ludendorff sent orders for the *Second Army* to attack on the 31st along its whole front, even if its left wing could not make headway; the two left corps of the *Seventeenth Army* (Hébuterne and Bucquoy sectors) were to co-operate.¹

The *Second Army* at once protested that such an attack required fresh and careful preparations, that the troops were tired, the reserves were not closed up, and the ammunition supply was insufficient. The operation was therefore postponed. The reports which came in during the night also indicated that the results of the fighting on the 30th, owing to insufficient preparation, had been even less successful than at first believed, and that another change of plan was imperative. O.H.L. seems to have been puzzled what to do. "In view of the strong hostile opposition, the immediate continuation of the offensive on a large scale must be abandoned. Ludendorff had the alternatives of either breaking off the Michael offensive and undertaking a great attack at some other place as soon as possible—which attack should be considerably more than the Georgette operation conceived only on the lines of a diversion—or, after a rest of several days, of renewing the attacks of the *Eighteenth* and *Second Armies* with the fresh forces which would have arrived, and after thorough preparation. He decided for the latter course; but he had no longer a far-reaching object in his mind; he did not intend to carry the operation further than necessary to obtain possession of Amiens. . . . In view of the course of the previous operations, pressure on Amiens northward of the Somme promised little result. The object was to be attained by an advance on both sides of the Avre in a general north-westerly direction. It was therefore necessary to extend the right wing of the *Eighteenth Army* further on the far side of the Avre, and to throw the enemy back over the Noye."²

At midday Ludendorff telegraphed to both Crown Princes that the *Eighteenth Army* should be organized to repel a French attack, but that the right wing, with strong forces concentrated on a narrow front, should push forward west of Moreuil, with the object of reaching the line Thory—Ailly (respectively 6 and 10 miles north-west of Montdidier), thus extending the line of the *Eighteenth Army* westward. For the purpose this wing required reinforcement by the *Second Army*.³ The latter Army, which was to strengthen its left wing without delay,⁴ should press forward on Amiens from Moreuil in the direction of Dommartin (on the Noye, 4 miles below—north—of Ailly), and simultaneously down the Avre and the Somme. A later order directed once more "the transfer of the main pressure of the *Second Army* into the country south of the Somme, "where fighting conditions are not so difficult, and have not so

¹ Schwarte iii., p. 401.

² Foerster, p. 289.

³ The *Second Army* sent 4 divisions to the *Eighteenth*.

⁴ Two divisions were moved to the left.

"distinct a character of position warfare. The pressure south of the Somme cannot be too sufficiently pronounced." ¹

The attack was fixed for the 4th April. In the *Second Army*, only the *LI. Corps* (Moreuil Wood sector) was ordered to advance on the 31st. "It obtained possession of the high ground between the Luce and Avre, but part of Moreuil [all in fact] still remained in enemy hands. . . . The *Eighteenth Army* received orders in general to organize defence." ²

¹ Foerster, p. 289.

² Schwarte iii., pp. 401 and 413.

CHAPTER VII

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*continued*)

1ST-3RD APRIL 1918

A LULL

(Maps 6, 9 ; Sketches 11, 12)

DURING the 1st, 2nd and 3rd April, there was a lull in the fighting. Only a few minor encounters took place, but there was much artillery and air activity : air fighting at low heights on the 1st and 2nd, when the weather was fine, until it turned to rain on the 3rd, and bombing both by day and by night. The Fifth Army, as from midnight 1st/2nd April, passed from the command of General Fayolle, under whom it had been since 11 P.M. on the 24th March, back to that of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig.¹

In Fayolle's Group of Armies, the three days were utilized "in organizing the ground defensively, echeloning the formations in depth, and pushing up ammunition and material";² a great many batteries and considerable air forces arrived, the first French aeroplanes appearing in the Moreuil area on the 1st April. The Germans made two small attacks near Grivesnes without success on the 1st April, and entered Morisel on the night of the 2nd/3rd April, only to be driven out again. Map 9.
Sketch 11.

On the 1st April by order of General Foch—after a conference with Sir Douglas Haig at Dury, Fifth Army headquarters, which is mentioned below—the French took over the line from Moreuil to Hangard (inclusive): their 133rd Divn relieved the 8th Divn in the Moreuil Wood sector on the night of the 1st/2nd April; and their 29th

¹ On 2nd April the Fifth Army was officially renamed the Fourth Army, but the old name is retained in this narrative until the close of the German offensive on 5th April.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 409.

Division replaced the 14th Divn (now under the command of Major-General P. C. B. Skinner) in the rest of the line, on the following night.¹

Before these reliefs took place, the attack which had been planned on the evening of the 31st March by the XIX. Corps, for the purpose of recovering the line lost near Rifle Wood, was carried out. The troops employed were the 4th, 5th and Canadian Cavalry Bdes, about a thousand dismounted men, under orders of Major-General T. T. Pitman (2nd Cavalry Divn). On the 1st April, after an intense artillery bombardment from 8.52 to 9 A.M., and under cover of a machine-gun barrage, the cavalymen advanced in three waves, the third passing through the second to complete the capture of the wood, reinforcements of the 5th Cavalry Bde then being brought up mounted. The operation was entirely successful, and a hundred prisoners and 13 machine guns were captured; but the cavalymen suffered considerably in beating off counter-attacks.

The 2nd Cavalry Divn was relieved by the 14th Divn and returned to the Cavalry Corps. After relief 24 hours later, by the French 29th Division, the 14th Divn, it may be added, relieved in turn the 1st Cavalry Divn and the 16th Divn in the sector between the Roman road and the Somme, on the night of the 3rd/4th April. As the 6th and 7th Cavalry Bdes of the 3rd Cavalry Divn (Major-General A. E. W. Harman) had rejoined from the French area on the 2nd, the whole of the cavalry was restored to the general reserve and assembled near Amiens, under the Cavalry Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. T. McM. Kavanagh). The 6th Cavalry Bde, however, remained in reserve to the 14th Divn.

At 7 P.M. on the 2nd, a small attack was made by two companies of the 18th Divn with the object of capturing by surprise the high ground north-west of Aubercourt, and gaining observation into the valley of the Luce. The evening was exceptionally clear, the companies were seen and fired on from the south side of the river, and the attempt had to be abandoned.

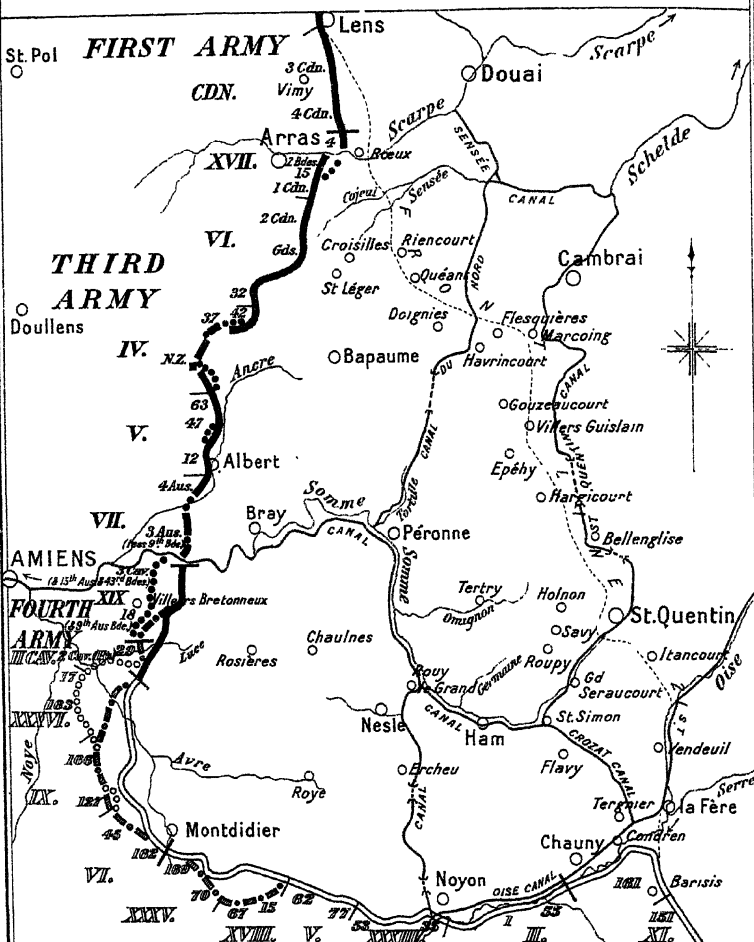
Map 6.
Sketch
12.

North of the Somme, the enemy was observed to be digging in; but there was a certain amount of "nibbling",

¹ The 14th Divn, from the III. Corps area on the original right of the Fifth Army, had arrived at Hébecourt (5 miles south of Amiens) on the 30th. It went into the line (see below) on the evening of the 1st April.

Sketch 12.

THE END OF THE BATTLE.



REFERENCE.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--|
| Line 30 th March | British. French. | Army boundaries . . . |
| Line 31 st March | ..... | Corps boundaries . . |
| Line 5 th April | ..... | Corps & Divisions for the 5 th April. |

Scale. 10 0 10 20 Miles.

Prepared in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

as they called it, by the Australians and New Zealanders, and reaction by the Germans in the Dernancourt sector, the advantage in every case remaining with the British. For instance, the New Zealand Division rushed trenches north-west of Beaumont Hamel and near One Tree Hill, and a post west of La Signy Farm. Near Hébuterne, in the afternoon of the 1st April, the 4th Australian Brigade killed a hundred Germans and captured seventy with four machine guns. On the night of the 2nd/3rd, the 32nd Division (Major-General C. D. Shute), which had relieved the 31st in the VI. Corps, carried out a more ambitious operation with four companies in front line, in order to capture Ayette (5½ miles north-east of Hébuterne) and to enclose it in the line. This village lay on the Cojeul just outside the front line, on a reverse slope, but afforded the enemy good observation, whilst in British hands it would be screened from view and fire. In intense darkness, at 2 A.M. on the 3rd April a successful advance was made from three directions under cover of an artillery barrage. Hard fighting ensued, and the capture was not quite completed by 7 A.M. Operations were therefore resumed at 9 P.M., when, under a barrage of Stokes mortars and Lewis guns, the whole objective was secured. The total casualties were 298; but 192 prisoners, 18 machine guns, and two heavy trench mortars were taken.

Of more interest than the fighting during this period are the conferences between the French and British high authorities. On the 1st April, M. Clemenceau in the morning visited and discussed the situation with Sir Douglas Haig. The Commander-in-Chief pointed out the importance of the Villers Bretonneux plateau, the highest ground in the vicinity, for protecting the British right and covering Amiens; he stated that he had not enough troops to enable him to make it secure, unless the French carried out their promise of relieving the British at least as far as Hangard. The French Prime Minister thereupon telephoned for General Foch, who arrived from Beauvais about 3 P.M. A conference then took place, at which Generals Weygand, Rawlinson, Davidson and de Barescut (Deputy Chief of the Staff) were also present. In consequence, General Foch sent an order to General Fayolle to carry out the relief, which took place, as we have seen. In this order it was specifically stated that the French were to be responsible for the Luce valley, and the British for the Villers Bretonneux plateau.

It transpired that French reinforcements were still arriving without "cookers", artillery without horses, and infantry with no more ammunition than 50-80 rounds on the man; further, that the British Quartermaster-General had given up 75 locomotives to help the French railway transport.

Map 9.
Sketch
11.

General Foch handed Sir Douglas Haig a Note (numbered 30), in which he made it clear that the British must not expect further help in the way of reinforcements from the French, who were, he stated, engaged "in full battle" around Montdidier, where the German pressure was greatest; and that the line Demuin—Hangard—Hamel must be held at all costs to cover Amiens; if the British required reinforcements for their share of the task, they must provide these themselves.

Sir Douglas Haig began to fear that not only would the French decline to help him either by supplying reinforcements or by taking over more of the line, but would not relieve the pressure on the British by the counter-offensive of which General Foch had previously spoken. To him, the main enemy pressure seemed to be directed against the British, not the French. Intelligence reports showed that on the battle front extending for 50 miles south of the Somme there were 27 German divisions in line and 14 in support, total 41; north of the Somme, on a 35-mile front, there were 31 divisions in front line, with 12 in support, total, 43; and a general reserve between the two fronts of 15 to 20 divisions. General Laguiche, the head of the French Mission at G.H.Q., tried to reassure him by explaining that the slowness of the French commanders was due to their thinking that they were still engaged in trench warfare, and therefore would not attack until heavy artillery had arrived and every detail of the preparations had been completed.

What General Foch himself had in mind is revealed in a letter, dated the 1st April, addressed to M. Clemenceau,¹ in which he wrote: "So far as can be judged to-day, the "enemy offensive from Arras to Montdidier and the Oise "appears to be checked: only a few small actions are still "in progress. If the offensive is resumed on a larger scale, "but with only such means of field warfare as are permitted "by a rapid march, the arrival of our reserves, which is "improving each day, will enable us to hold it." He continued that if the Germans waited until heavy artillery

¹ F.O.A., vi. (i.), p. 397.

could be brought up, then the French heavy artillery would also be in action : the danger points seemed to be the railway centres near Amiens and St. Just (9 miles south-west of Montdidier), which could be reached by long-range guns ; it would therefore be necessary to order "partial offensives" to drive the enemy away from them.

What the Germans would do next it was impossible to foresee. From the central position of their great salient in France they might strike either westwards or southwards. Sir Douglas Haig was convinced that their plan was to deal first with the British ; but whether they would continue the "Michael" offensive or strike at a new place he could not yet determine, as they were showing the normal signs of preparation for attack from Arras right up to Ypres.

Even before the 21st March, the date on which "Michael" began, preparations for what we now know as "George I" (on a 12-mile front with Armentières in the middle) and "George II" (opposite Ypres), had been brought to the notice of the Commander-in-Chief ; by the beginning of April all reports showed that these preparations were nearing completion.

Taking stock of his own resources—the return is marked 9 A.M. 1st April—he found that amongst his 58 divisions (excluding cavalry and Portuguese) there were nine used divisions made up to 800 infantry per battalion (drafts posted, arrived or en route) ;¹ seven used divisions in the course of being made up ;² three exhausted divisions which could not be made up for the present ;³ and fifteen exhausted divisions still in or near the line.⁴ The only reserve left at the disposal of G.H.Q., besides some of the above reconstituted nine divisions, was the 57th Division.⁵

To meet the danger in the north, whilst providing for the more pressing necessity of supplying reinforcements for the Fifth and Third Armies, Sir Douglas Haig had on the 23rd March warned General Plumer to make arrangements for evacuating the Passchendaele salient should circumstances demand it :⁶ a withdrawal might not only upset

¹ 3rd, 6th, 17th, 19th, 25th, 34th, 56th, 59th and 63rd.

² Guards, 9th, 21st, 31st, 40th, 41st, 51st. ³ 30th, 36th, 50th.

⁴ 8th, 12th, 14th, 16th, 18th, 20th, 24th, 35th, 39th, 42nd, 47th, 58th, 61st, 62nd, 66th.

⁵ This 2nd Line Territorial division had arrived in France in February 1917, and had fought at Passchendaele in the last phase of "Third Ypres".

⁶ G.H.Q. had ordered plans to be made for this as early as 10th January. See "1918" Vol. I., p. 44.

any plans the enemy might have formed to carry out an offensive at that point, but also would shorten the line held by the Second Army and release a few troops for use elsewhere. Meanwhile, the divisions withdrawn from the battle in the south for reorganization and rest had been sent up behind the Lys front.¹ Signs that the Germans were moving in the north came to notice on the 2nd April, the First Army reporting enemy concentrations at daylight between Vendin le Vieil (N.N.E. of Lens) and the La Bassée canal. These, taken in combination with air reports of railway activity on the lines passing through Cambrai, Valenciennes and Douai, seemed to point to a renewal of the offensive on the Arras front which might extend as far north as the canal, that is, on the First Army front. In referring to the warning, G.H.Q. informed Generals Byng and Horne that the Commander-in-Chief considered the Third Army should maintain adequate reserves in the northern portion of the Army area, in readiness to assist the First Army. There still remained such a mass of enemy divisions concentrated on the southern battlefield, in a position to take advantage of any weakening of the British in this area, that though the German progress had been checked for the moment, it was impossible to reduce the forces astride the Somme to any extent. To consolidate the command in this area, on the 3rd April G.H.Q. ordered that the part of the Third Army front from the Somme to a point about one mile north of Albert (held by the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions) should be handed over to the Fifth (Fourth) Army, with all the corps and Army troops and artillery in the area behind it: eventually, all five Australian divisions were to be transferred to the Fifth Army, which would then consist of the VII., XIX. and Australian Corps.

On the 3rd April, an Inter-Allied Conference was held at Beauvais, which further defined the powers of General Foch. Ever since the 26th March, when he had been "charged with the co-ordination of the Allied Armies on "the Western Front", he had been in correspondence on the subject with M. Clemenceau, since he regarded his position as anomalous. He had been given, he said, responsibility without proportionate authority: he had "to persuade (not always easy) instead of directing": and "often experienced trouble in obtaining the execution of "measures, judged to be urgent, and even immediately "necessary". M. Clemenceau therefore called a con-

¹ The distribution will be given in a later chapter.

ference, which met at 3 P.M. At this, besides General Foch, there were present, Generals Pershing and Bliss, General Pétain, Mr. Lloyd George, Field-Marshal Sir D. Haig, General Sir H. Wilson and Br.-General Spears (Head of the British Military Mission in Paris).

After some discussion, it was settled, the British Commander-in-Chief being in full agreement, "to entrust "to General Foch the strategic direction of military "operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, "French and American Armies will have full control of the "tactical action of their respective Armies. Each Com- "mander-in-Chief will have the right to appeal to his "Government if, in his opinion, his Army is endangered by "reason of any order received from General Foch."¹

The protocol continued :

"Sir Douglas Haig then requested that the meeting "should come to a decision that a French offensive should "be started as soon as possible in order to attract the "enemy's reserves and withdraw pressure from the British. "Generals Foch and Pétain stated that it was their firm "intention to launch an attack as early as possible in a "few days."

In Sir Douglas Haig's opinion, the Germans might very well think that the British were exhausted and that another blow quickly delivered against them would complete their undoing: there was also another reason for the rapid resumption of the offensive by the Germans, the fact that the depth of their thrust had left them with a long and open flank between Noyon and Montdidier—east of Noyon the flank was covered by the Oise—exposed to attack by the French, who by a short advance might reach the enemy's improvised communications: to guard against such a contingency, and to retain the initiative, the Germans would therefore renew the attack.

"General Foch, however, considered that the solution "suggested by Field-Marshal Haig only dealt with a part "of the problem raised by the situation of the moment",²

¹ The protocol was drawn up entirely in English, but the resolution as regards the powers to be assigned to General Foch was recorded in the two languages, French and English. The agreement was subject, as far as the American Army was concerned, to the approval of the United States Government, which was subsequently given.

A suitable title for General Foch was settled by correspondence, and from 14th April, he became "Général en chef des Armées alliées en "France".

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 405.

and, on the strength of the new authority conferred on him, he issued, later in the day, his General Directive No. 2.

I.

The enemy has paused to-day on the front from Arras to the Oise. On this front he may resume the offensive :

(a) easily north of the Somme, and particularly in the region of Arras, thanks to the numerous railways at his disposal ;

(b) with more difficulty south of the Somme, the railways which he has captured being less numerous than those above mentioned, in a bad state, and lying partly within range of our guns.

We may therefore expect :

an offensive on the front north of the Somme, perhaps even a strong offensive ;

south of the Somme an offensive on a minor scale, and not at once.

II.

From the point of view of our interests the enemy must, as soon as possible, be driven farther away :

(1) from the railway—St. Just—Breteuil—Amiens ;

(2) from the junction of railways at Amiens.

To do this :

(1) he must be attacked south of the Somme in the Montdidier region ;

(2) he must be attacked astride the Somme from the Luce to the Ancre.

We shall in addition thereby encourage the realization of the master ideas which have hitherto directed our operations :

the security of the liaison of the French and British Armies ; the covering of Amiens.

On the other hand, without pretending to decisive objectives, we shall, thanks to the enveloping form of our front, be able to inflict a serious check on the enemy ; also, our offensive astride and south of the Somme is the best answer to an enemy offensive or possible offensive north of that river.

III.

These considerations lead to fixing the task of the Allied Armies for the next period of operations as follows :

(1) As soon as possible, an offensive of the French Armies in the Montdidier region with a view to freeing the St. Just—Amiens railway, and, profiting by the favourable form of our front, driving the enemy into the Avre, and pushing north in the direction of Roye ;

(2) An offensive of the British Army astride the Somme between the Luce and the Ancre in an easterly direction, with a view to freeing Amiens.

It is of the greatest importance that these two offensives should be executed simultaneously, as their directions combine admirably.

The Commanders-in-Chief are therefore begged to inform me of the date on which they could undertake these operations, which it is important should be carried out with the least possible delay.

(3) Defensive for the moment on the front from Albert to Arras, which it is important therefore to organize as rapidly as possible in this sense, bearing in mind the ground and the reserves available.

The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief the British Armies in France is therefore requested to report the dispositions he has taken or intends to take in view of the requirements of the defence.

In a letter which accompanied the General Directive, General Foch informed the British Commander-in-Chief that the attention of General Pétain had been called to the necessity of maintaining reserves in the area north of Beauvais available to assist the British should the Germans attack them in "very superior numbers";¹ he therefore emphasized the necessity of strengthening the defences between the Somme and the Arras region, as French help might not be near enough for immediate intervention. Entering into tactical details, he advised organization in successive lines, with the troops and guns disposed in depth, and the formation of reserves.

General Foch also forwarded to G.H.Q. for issue to the R.A.F.,² should the Field-Marshal approve, a copy of instructions (directives) for the co-operation of the French and British air services, which were dated the 1st April and had already been sent to General Fayolle.³ They showed "a strategic mind surveying the whole battlefield, "irrespective of boundaries".⁴ Shortly, they advocated, as regards bombing, concentration on a few of the most important of the enemy's railway junctions, and, as regards

¹ See page 99. General Pétain proposed to assemble the Fifth and Tenth Armies near Beauvais. On 3rd April, 5 divisions were in the course of detraining (81st, 82nd, 48th, 129th, 154th), and on 6th and 8th April, two more (11th and 153rd) began to detrain. F.O.A.

² The Royal Flying Corps became the Royal Air Force on 1st April.

³ Appendix 5.

⁴ "The War in the Air" Vol. IV. p. 348, where some interesting comments will be found.

fighting aeroplanes, assistance to the troops on the ground by incessant attacks on columns, concentrations and bivouacs : air fighting was not to be sought except in so far as it was necessary for the fulfilment of these duties. There was a hint that the Allied services might be called on to assist in each other's zones ; but, as no provision for united command was suggested, it appeared that the Germans would still retain the advantage of unity of direction. On the very day that General Foch issued his instructions, there were south of Arras, 822 German aircraft opposed to 645 of the R.A.F., whilst some 2,000 French aeroplanes had no more than 367 German opposite them.¹ Thus, although the enemy was outnumbered by nearly five to two in the Western theatre, he had a numerical superiority on the British part of the battlefield of five to four.

Sir Douglas Haig had taken the opportunity of meeting the Prime Minister at the conference on the 3rd April to champion the cause of General Sir H. Gough.² He pointed out that the late commander of the Fifth Army had had few reserves : he had held a very extended front recently taken over from the French and without proper defences : the weight of the enemy attack had in the end fallen on the Fifth Army : in spite of his great difficulties, General Gough had never lost his head. Mr. Lloyd George, who appeared much alarmed about the situation both at the front and in Parliament, replied that General Gough had neither held nor destroyed the Somme bridges, and must not be employed again. In a subsequent letter, Lord Derby, as Secretary of State for War, informed the Commander-in-Chief that there was intense public feeling in England against General Gough, as among the wounded of the Fifth Army now in various hospitals at home there was a consensus of opinion that he was unfitted to command. To this Sir Douglas Haig responded by offering to resign if the Government desired to get rid of him also. He felt that it was difficult to serve masters who advanced inaccurate statements and the uninformed criticism of subordinates as reasons for removal, without due enquiry, of a responsible commander. No notice was taken of the Commander-in-Chief's offer,

¹ See "The War in the Air" Vol. IV., p. 350 and Appendix XVI.

² On 2nd April a nucleus Army headquarters under General Gough, for a Reserve Army, had been assembled at Cr  cy en Ponthieu. It was to be responsible for the construction of all G.H.Q. defence lines.

Lord Derby telegraphing in answer : " It is quite clear to me that his troops have lost confidence in Gough, and before seeing you Prime Minister had consulted with me as to his retention in command of an Army, and, with my full concurrence, notified to you yesterday, that pending report in detail with regard to recent operations he should vacate his command of the Fifth Army and return home ".¹

So General Sir Hubert Gough was ordered to England. An enquiry, however, was refused to him ; but at the same time he was informed in a letter from the War Office, drafted by the hand of Lord Milner, who had meantime become Secretary of State for War : " In harmony with the opinion of his advisers, the Secretary of State does not feel that you are in any way disqualified for a command appropriate to your rank and service, and your name will, if you so desire it, be considered as opportunities occur. The gallant fight of the Fifth Army against such heavy odds and in circumstances of extraordinary difficulty, will always rank as one of the most noteworthy episodes in the Great War."

On an occasion when an admirer of the Field-Marshal Count von Moltke was praising his achievements in 1866 and 1870-1, the old Field-Marshal closed the interview by saying, " I was never tested by having to conduct a retreat ". Lord Milner's letter hardly does sufficient justice to the Fifth Army, composed practically of non-professional soldiers, and to its commander and to the staffs. Rendered blind by fog, overwhelmed by one of the most violent bombardments of the War, General Gough's eleven divisions, weak from reduction in infantry and from lack of reinforcements, were driven out of indifferent entrenchments, recently taken over from the French, by the attack of two German Armies² with 22 divisions in the front line and 22 in support. For seven days, fighting by day and moving by night, with scant assistance, they had carried out a retirement in the face of a powerful and highly trained enemy, their line pierced but never broken : inflicting heavy casualties, they had resisted that enemy's

¹ On 6th April, General Sir Henry Wilson informed the Director of Military Operations, War Office, that Haig had offered to resign if the Government wished, but that he had told the Prime Minister that " they would not get anyone to fight a defensive battle better than Haig, and that the time to get rid of him was when the German attack was over ".

² Only the northernmost corps (2 divisions) of the *Second Army* was originally on the front of the Third Army. See " 1918 " Vol. I., Sketch 12.

efforts with such success that his progress was gradually slowed down and time was gained to bring up reinforcements, so that the great German plan of annihilating the British Army in a single offensive failed and had to be abandoned. This is something more than "one of the" "most noteworthy episodes of the War", and it was by no means the end of the Fifth Army's achievements, as will be seen.

On the day on which Sir Douglas Haig had appealed to Mr. Lloyd George on behalf of General Gough, a huge mass meeting of engineers at Woolwich Arsenal passed, with one dissentient, the following resolution; it was typical of the feeling in the masses at home, and greatly cheered the Commander-in-Chief:

"That the engineers assembled at this public meeting
"pledge themselves to support the country in fighting until
"the German military machine is smashed."

NOTE I.

THE GERMANS DURING 1ST-3RD APRIL

"The fighting during the closing days of March had left no doubt that the great offensive battle was threatening to become a battle of attrition on the largest scale. Everywhere along the long front of nearly 120 miles the infantry had been compelled to have recourse to the spade, and saw the spectre of hated position warfare rising before it. The situation was very much more unfavourable than before the 21st March: no trenches, no dug-outs, streaming rain for days, which had turned the devastated area behind the troops into a morass, and caused the roads and tracks laboriously rendered serviceable to break up again. More and more reports trickled in of fresh enemy divisions springing up round the fragile salient which had been won; more and more the artillery fire swelled in volume; higher and higher rose the losses of the Germans in dead, wounded and sick, and more and more did the spirit of their attack evaporate."

"Preparations were indeed in progress at another place, over in Flanders, for another surprise attack; nevertheless, the Supreme Command decided to try its luck with Amiens once more. Perhaps now, after a breathing space, after the arrival of fresh divisions and the replenishment of the ammunition dumps, the thing could be done".¹

So, during the 1st, 2nd and 3rd April, the German attacks were entirely suspended and everybody's energies directed towards preparing the blow fixed for the 4th.²

¹ Goes, pp. 180-1.

² Schwarte iii., pp. 401, 414.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN PICARDY (*concluded*)

4TH AND 5TH APRIL 1918

THE LAST PHASE

(Maps 10, 11, 12 ; Sketches A, 11, 12)

THE German Supreme Command, after giving the troops of the *Eighteenth, Second and Seventeenth Armies* a rest from the 1st until the 3rd April, on the two following days made one last effort to reach Amiens, by attacks south of the Somme on the 4th, and astride and north of the Somme on the 5th.

Much rain fell during the night of the 3rd/4th April, and this was followed by a morning mist. It then rained all day : the ground fought over became so muddy that regimental histories of both sides speak of difficulty of movement and of rifles becoming so clogged as to be useless. Owing to the bad weather there was little flying on the 4th or on the following day.

Prisoners taken on the 3rd had stated that a serious attack was planned for next day, so that it came as no surprise when, about 5.15 A.M. on the 4th, a heavy bombardment opened, which fell not only on the front line but on the artillery positions and back areas. The infantry attack followed about 6.30 A.M.¹

It was the beginning of the last stage of the great March offensive, and took place wholly south of the Somme, being designed to reach the line marked by Grivesnes—east of Ailly—Bois de Gentelles—Blangy Tronville, so as to

Map 10.
Sketch
11.

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 418, states the bombardment opened at 4 A.M. and the infantry attacks followed at 7.30 A.M. The British record seems to be confirmed by German regimental histories. Goes (p. 181) does not give the time, but mentions that the bombardment was mainly gas shell against the batteries.

cover ground from which long-range artillery, 10,000 to 14,000 yds., could be brought to bear on the Amiens railway centre and bridges. The operation was to be closely followed on the 5th by a thrust against the town of Amiens itself. Made on a 15-mile front, from Grivesnes to Bouzen-court on the Somme (opposite Sailly le Sec) with 17 divisions (six of them fresh)—12 on a 9-mile front against the French, and five on a 6-mile front against the British—it failed to do more than gain a little ground, and stopped far short of the objective.¹

The attack fell on the French First Army and the British Fifth Army; no events of importance took place on the front of the French Sixth and Third Armies, or on that of the British Third Army, but the latter sent reinforcements and rendered artillery assistance from the north bank of the Somme to the Fifth Army. Artillery, indeed, played an important part in the defeat of the German efforts.

On the French First Army front, from Montdidier to Hangard (inclusive), there were seven divisions, with eight more within reach; they were supported by 580 field and 378 heavy guns.² Against the front, Sauvillers—Moreuil Wood, held by only two divisions, the 163rd and the 2nd Dismounted Cavalry, of the XXXVI. Corps, five fresh German divisions advanced. These gradually drove back the French over two miles; although the 166th Division of the French IX. Corps on the right, and the 29th Division, on the left, conformed to the retirement, they otherwise succeeded in holding their own. A considerable dent was thus made in the French front. But further progress of the enemy was then checked by counter-attacks of reserves and by the arrival of reinforcements from the 59th and 17th Divisions: "the attack which had begun so well, "was broken . . . in spite of valour, it could not be got going "again".³

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 413, states that at the time it was estimated that 16 divisions (14 fresh) were employed against the French. German accounts and the regimental histories do not bear this out. There were certainly only 6 fresh divisions employed (5 against the French and one against the British). From south to north, the divisions were *1st Guard*, *5th*, *6th*, *23rd*, *80th Reserve* (fresh), *53rd Reserve* (fresh), *14th* (fresh), *2nd Bavarian* (fresh), *2nd Guard*, *54th* (fresh), *199th* and the *25th* astride the Luce; and then against the British, the *19th*, *Guard Ersatz*, *9th Bavarian Reserve* (fresh), *228th* and *4th Guard*.

² These include 14 field brigades of the British 8th, 20th, 24th and 30th Divns, and their attached Army brigades, and 10 heavy batteries of the XVIII. Corps.

³ Goes, p. 185.

The sector of the British front which was attacked was held by the 18th and 14th Divns, with the 35th Battalion of the 9th Australian Brigade (attached to the 18th Divn), extended from the railway to the Roman road, between them.¹ Both divisions had belonged to the III. Corps, and had suffered considerable losses in the fighting of the 21st March and following days; both had been partly filled up with drafts; but there had not been time to absorb the new arrivals, far less to train them, and all battalions were exceedingly weak in officers and experienced n.-c.o.'s. Each of these two divisions had five battalions in front line.² The 38rd Battalion of the 9th Australian Brigade and the 6th Cavalry Bde were in support and reserve. Behind them, the Gentelles line was manned by the 24th Divn, the two remaining battalions (34th and 36th) of the 9th Australian Brigade, the 11/King's (pioneers of the 14th Divn), and details, with the 7th and Canadian Cavalry Bdes in reserve. Behind them again, near Amiens, stood the 2nd Cavalry Divn. Thus the troops of the XIX. Corps were disposed in considerable depth. The 18th Divn was supported by the artillery of the 50th and 66th; the 14th Divn by that of the 14th, 16th and 39th: the five heavy brigades, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 68th and 76th, of the XIX. Corps, covered the front. In general, there was good observation from the Villers Bretonneux plateau, but the valleys parallel to the front, leading down on either side to the Luce and the Somme, gave the enemy considerable cover and protection during his approach.

The Australians and the 18th Divn, though its extreme left next to them fell back, repulsed all the morning attacks. Three times did the Germans try to advance, using the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division*, which was quite fresh to the battle, opposite the 35th Australian Battalion; but caught by heavy fire of guns, machine guns and rifles, they never progressed much beyond their jumping-off places. Further north, however, the 14th Divn, having carried out reliefs, as we know, on three successive nights, was not only very tired, but also had not seen the ground by daylight; on this front the enemy succeeded in breaking in. The 41st Bde

¹ The artillery of the 14th Divn had arrived on 1st April from the French front; that of the 18th did not arrive in time to take part in the battle.

² The 58th Divn (less artillery), the third division of the III. Corps, at last released by the French, was on its way to the XIX. Corps, but only two battalions had arrived, the 6/London being in Villers Bretonneux, and the 7/London in Boves.

(Br.-General C. R. P. Winser) fell back in some disorder, but stood for a time on a support position five hundred yards behind the front line, where it was assisted by a company from the 43rd Bde (Br.-General R. S. Tempest) which in the very early morning had been moved up to the north-east of Villers Bretonneux. It then retired about three thousand yards, to the next ridge, west of Bois de Vaire, which it reached about 10 A.M. On the left of the 41st, near the Somme, the 42nd Bde (Br.-General G. N. B. Forster), assisted by the guns of the VII. Corps on the northern bank, at first held its ground; now attacked both in front and on the flank which was exposed by the retirement of the 41st, and in rear,¹ it also retired, in some haste, but covered by the 9/K.R.R.C. The brigade commander, Br.-General G. N. B. Forster, unwilling to cause uneasiness in a critical situation by the premature withdrawal of his headquarters, remained in Hamel to the last, and was captured about midday with two of his staff. He was killed by a chance bullet soon afterwards.²

Turning south as well as north, the Germans next attacked the flank of the 35th Australian Battalion, which fell back fighting to a support position recently dug a mile east of Villers Bretonneux. The left flank of the 18th Divn, which had already fallen back, then linked up with the Australians; its right flank was secured, as the French in Hangard were still holding firm.³ The 33rd Australian Battalion was then sent up to extend the left of the 35th and fill any gap that might have occurred between the 18th and 14th Divns. After the 43rd Bde had gone forward to the north-east of Villers Bretonneux, the 11/King's (Pioneers) and the 6th Cavalry Bde had been moved up to the north-east and north of the town, with a view to a counter-attack. This idea was not carried out; for after the 10th Hussars had tried in vain to stop the advancing Germans by an attack on their right, the three cavalry regiments had to be used to fill gaps in the line.

¹ The 4th Guard Division had sent a regiment to follow the right flank of the 228th and then turn northwards.

² The brigade-major managed to hide and escape after dark.

³ The attack of the 25th Division astride the Luce did not take place. The division was to wait until Hangard Hill, north of the village in the British 18th Divn area had been taken by the 19th Division. But this attack failed, the British artillery having got the better of the German. At 5 P.M. the resumption of the attack was ordered, but again the artillery preparation was inadequate, and "finally it was understood that no further attempt would be of any use". "Regt. No. 115" and "Regt. No. 116".

Thus a new line was formed, in which the 14th Divn, now very weak, had all its reserves engaged. There remained the XIX. Corps reserve, the 3rd Cavalry Divn (less the 6th Cavalry Bde), and at 9.45 A.M. Lieut-General Watts had ordered the 7th Cavalry Bde to the north-east of Villers Bretonneux to support the 6th. The Canadian Cavalry Bde was directed to be ready to move, and at 11.50 A.M. the 24th Divn was ordered to man the Gentelles line, the 7/London (58th Division) at Boves being sent to assist it.

North of the Roman road, the new line, in establishing which a company of the 58th Australian Battalion, holding the Somme crossing at Vaux, took part, was held successfully for the rest of the day. All attempts to advance made by the Germans were stopped, largely by artillery fire, the guns remaining in action although the enemy came within 1,500 yards of them; some guns of the 16th Divn were indeed taken forward on to the crest line, and fired over open sights with great effect.

South of the road there was further hard fighting. Two German divisions (the *Guard Ersatz* and the fresh *9th Bavarian Reserve*) at 4 P.M., after an hour's hurricane bombardment, launched a fresh attack from the south-east, in spite of the rain, towards Cachy—Villers Bretonneux against the 18th Divn. The 55th Bde (Br.-General E. A. Wood), on the left, with its left bent back and hampered by the mud, which rendered many rifles unserviceable, was driven from its position. The enemy then got into the northern part of Lancer Wood and turned the flank of the 7/R. West Kent, holding the front line of the 53rd Bde (Br.-General H. W. Higginson), which narrowly escaped being surrounded. A counter-attack by the 8/R. Berkshire stopped the Germans for a time, but both battalions, after heavy casualties, were finally forced back over a mile to the Bois de Hangard—Villers Bretonneux road, Lieut.-Colonel R. E. Dewing of the Berkshire being killed. The 54th Bde (Br.-General L. W. de V. Sadleir Jackson), on the right, was also driven back to the southern continuation of the same road, its right still clinging to the French in Hangard.

In their new position, the 53rd and 54th Bdes were able to resist further attacks, but part of the 55th, in some confusion after its retirement and reduced by heavy losses, was driven from its line, so that a wide gap was opened between it and the 35th and 38rd Australian Battalions.

Having its flank exposed, the 35th, after trying to fill the gap, fell back on Villers Bretonneux; it carried with it the right of the 33rd. But for five Canadian motor machine-gun batteries, with six armoured cars—sent up by the Fourth Army with orders to hold Villers Bretonneux to the last—which came into action about 4 P.M. north-east and south of the town, the way into it from the south-east seemed open to the enemy.

Br.-General C. Rosenthal (9th Australian Brigade) had, however, during the morning moved up his other two battalions, so that the 34th now stood north-west of Villers Bretonneux and the 36th in a little valley immediately south of the town.¹ He now placed both battalions at the disposal of Lieut.-Colonel H. A. Goddard (commanding the 35th), who was given command of the defence.

At this critical moment, about 5 P.M., the reserve company of the 35th Australian and three companies of the 6/London (58th Divn) were in cellars in Villers Bretonneux, while the 7/Queen's (the reserve of the 55th Bde), lay near "the Monument", south of the town.² The enemy had nearly reached the Demuin—Villers Bretonneux road, and the artillery south of the town was retiring, the last battery being fired on at a range of 400 yards, as it was getting away.³ Lieut.-Colonel Goddard ordered the 36th Australian (Lieut.-Colonel J. A. Milne) from its convenient valley to counter-attack south of the railway. The attack went forward about 5.45 P.M., the reserve company of the 35th joining in on the left, and the 7/Queen's, led by Br.-General E. A. Wood (55th Bde), on the right; the 6/London followed in second line. These fresh troops, few in number but thrown in exactly at the right moment, pressed forward with great spirit and swept back the advancing Germans.⁴

North of the railway, the portion of the 33rd Australian

¹ Villers Bretonneux was a prosperous manufacturing town of over 5,000 inhabitants and 1,101 houses, on a level site; it contained 9 cotton mills (with large quantities of cotton in bale), 3 brick works, a hat factory, and a *raeperie* (beet preparing works).

² This monument, mentioned many times in the later fighting in the neighbourhood, was a French memorial to the fallen in the battle of Villers Bretonneux (La Hallue), fought 23rd/24th Dec. 1870; it had a plantation of trees around it, which in many accounts of the 1918 battle is spoken of as "Monument Wood".

³ According to Goes, the 9th Bavarian Reserve Division was within 440 yards of Villers Bretonneux, and the Guard Ersatz had reached Cachy.

⁴ "The Bavarian Reserve Division had to be withdrawn in the face of strong counter-attacks. . . . The Guard Ersatz Division, on its left, also lost what it had gained in the afternoon." Goes, p. 182.

Battalion which had retired went forward again, a squadron of the 17th Lancers galloping up to cover its left, and a Canadian motor machine-gun battery dealing with the enemy machine guns. Finally, the 6/London filled a gap on the right of the 7/Queen's, and the 34th Australian Battalion was sent forward to fill another between the 36th and 33rd Battalions. By 7 P.M. the line east of Villers Bretonneux was securely established.

During the night and in the early morning of the 5th, the 55th Bde was collected at Gentelles, and Br.-General Higginson, with the 53rd Bde, took over the whole line between the 54th and the 9th Australian Brigades.

One more movement remains to be mentioned. The 9th Australian Brigade found that it had a poor field of fire; in order to improve it, at 1 A.M. on the 5th April, in inky darkness, the 34th and 33rd Battalions, with the reserve company of the 35th, made a silent advance of 200-300 yards to the trench which had been held by the 35th in the afternoon. The 33rd reached its objective without casualties, but the 34th, near the railway, had some stiff fighting before it established itself in the old line.

During the night, the field artillery of the XIX. Corps, which had contributed so much to the repulse of the enemy by remaining in action at close range, was gradually withdrawn to new positions, as were also the heavy batteries. Under orders issued at 5 P.M. by the XIX. Corps, the 3rd Cavalry Divn took over the line of the exhausted 14th Divn from the Roman road to the Somme. Major-General Harman was also authorized to employ the 15th Australian Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Elliott), 5th Australian Division, and any troops of the 14th Divn he might wish to retain. Accordingly he kept the 43rd Bde, the pioneers (11/King's) and the machine-gun battalion, adding the infantry and pioneers to his reserve.

The 15th Australian Brigade, from the Third Army, had been holding the defensive flank along the northern bank of the Somme; its two reserve battalions, the 59th and 60th, had been sent over by General Byng at 2 P.M. to the assistance of the Fifth Army, and they now went into the line. The 57th and 58th Battalions had to wait in their position along the Somme until relieved by the 35th Divn, and it was past midnight before they joined the 3rd Cavalry Divn, the 58th going to the left of the line and pushing forward in order to ensure the junction of the Fifth and Third Armies.

The 5th Australian Brigade (Br.-General R. Smith) of the 2nd Australian Division, then in G.H.Q. reserve and approaching Bussy les Daours (5 miles E.N.E. of Amiens), at 12.45 P.M. had been placed by G.H.Q. at the disposal of the Fifth Army, if required. Ordered at 7.30 P.M. to cross the river, it arrived at Blangy Tronville, behind the left of the Gentelles line, about 11 P.M. At 3.30 P.M., the rest of the 5th Australian Division (then under the X. Corps and about $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-west of Albert)¹ had been placed under the Fifth Army; its 8th Brigade reached Vecquemont (on the northern bank of the Somme due north of Bois de Gentelles) by bus about 2 A.M. on the 5th, and was sent on to Bois des Gentelles in reserve to the XIX. Corps, where it arrived about 10.30 A.M.; the 14th Brigade arrived at Aubigny later in the day.

During a visit of General Weygand to G.H.Q. on the 4th, Generals Lawrence and Davidson, by direction of the Commander-in-Chief, suggested to him that the French should either ease the situation by counter-attacking, or should take over some of the line held by the British, as the latter were short of reserves. General Foch's Chief of the Staff could do no more than refer them to General Directive No. 2. General Pétain, in bringing this directive to the notice of his Groups of Armies, on the 4th, instructed the G.A.R. to take the following measures:

(a) to drive the enemy back across the Trois Doms and the Avre between Montdidier and Moreuil and prevent his using the valleys of these rivers as *places d'armes*. "This action is urgent";

(b) to push the French front northwards to the plateau Villers aux Erables—Marcelcave by a movement in combination with the First and British Fifth Armies, in order to facilitate future operations; and

(c) to gain possession of the "massif de Boulogne la Grasse" (the wooded heights 6 miles south-east of Montdidier).

In view of the German attack on the 4th, General Debeney (First Army) ordered a counter-attack to be made next day to regain the ground lost; then, to ensure his left holding fast, he placed General Robillot—whose troops

¹ The X. Corps headquarters, under Lieut.-General Sir T. L. N. Morland, was used to administer the Third Army reserves. See "1918" Vol. I., p. 392.

(22nd and 62nd Divisions) had been transferred to the XVIII. Corps—in command of the 2nd Dismounted Cavalry and 29th Divisions on that flank.

As a result of these orders, and since the Germans on the front of the G.A.R. remained on the defensive,¹ three attacks were made by the French First Army on the 5th April: by the 45th Division, which had just come up from reserve, against Cantigny (8½ miles north-west of Montdidier); by the 127th and 166th Divisions towards Aubvillers—Sauvillers—Mailly; and by the 17th Division, also from the reserve, and the 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division towards Moreuil—Castel. The attacks, made over muddy ground after a heavy night's rain, "failed under the violent fire of "the German infantry". There was no change in the situation, and General Debeney then ordered the First Army to remain on the defensive.

Map 11.
Sketch
11.

Two attacks were made by the Germans against the XIX. Corps on the 5th April, but only at the left extremity of the line.² After an hour and a half's bombardment, about 11 A.M. the *1st* and *228th Divisions* advanced against the 6th Cavalry Bde and the 15th Australian Brigade north of the Roman road. They were met by such heavy fire of all kinds, that the attempt was brought to a standstill a very short distance from its starting point.

All through the morning heavy fire had been maintained on the 54th Bde, immediately north of Hangard, and the French 29th Division, next to it, but not until 4 P.M., after half an hour's intense bombardment, did enemy infantry advance. They gained the front line of one battalion from the British, and the cemetery of Hangard and neighbouring wood from the French.³ A combined counter-attack made at 7.20 P.M., supported by the artillery of the 50th Divn, completely recovered the lost ground.

At 8 P.M. Lieut.-General Watts and his Staff were relieved in the command of the XIX. Corps by Lieut.-General Butler and the Staff of the III. Corps. They had earned a rest; for they had been continuously in action since 21st March, and

¹ Except near Hangard, next to the British.

² These were part of the general attack by the German *Second Army*, whose front extended from near Moreuil to Beaumont Hamel. See Note at end of Chapter.

³ The histories of the regiments of the *19th* and *25th Divisions*, opposite this front, do not mention this attack, which seems to have been made by the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division*, fresh on the 4th.

had had under them from the 28th March to the 1st April from nine to eleven divisions, besides large detachments.

Map 12.
Sketch
12.

Fiercer attacks were made north of the Somme on the 5th April by the *Second Army*, the left of the *Seventeenth Army* joining in, against parts of the fronts of the VII., V. and IV. Corps of the Third Army. A general offensive to be directed against the whole front covered by these formations had been ordered by the Supreme Command, but actually only isolated attacks took place. These were carried out by picked troops, and designed mainly to extend the very shallow bridgehead held across the marshy valley of the Ancre from Buire to Hamel; to break in south of Hébuterne; and to capture Bucquoy. Possession of this last objective would deprive the British of the good observation which that village afforded, and secure on the Artois plateau a footing, which was then to be exploited. The German successes were very small, too small to be shown on the map.

The bombardment of the whole Third Army front was begun in mist and light rain at 7 A.M. with gas shells against the battery positions; but along a considerable part of the front the fire soon became irregular, in some cases the front line receiving attention early, in others, late. To this bombardment, according to German accounts, the British made "a strong reply". Warning of attack had been given by prisoners and deserters on the previous day, active patrolling had been carried on throughout the night, so dawn found all units alert and ready.

The VII. Corps front (Lieut.-General Sir W. N. Congreve), from the Somme to Albert (exclusive), was now held by the 3rd Australian Division (Major-General Sir J. Monash) and 4th Australian Division (Major-General E. G. Sinclair-MacLagan), respectively south and north of the Ancre; the 35th Divn (Major-General A. H. Marindin) was in reserve, although its artillery was in action.¹

The main struggle developed in two movements: a feeble advance against the village of Treux, east of the Ancre, just south of Buire; and a most determined effort westwards from Dernancourt. Artillery fire was more intense than on the 28th, but the enemy infantry seemed less

¹ Each Australian division had only two brigades present, the other having been detached to hold various parts of the British front; it had to keep both brigades in the line: 11th, 10th, 13th, 12th, from right to left.

fresh and less enterprising than in its attacks on that day. Whilst the bombardment was still in progress, the enemy swept Treux with machine-gun fire; but no infantry was seen until an hour later, and then only to be forced back to shelter by machine-gun fire.¹ Similar attempts made at 10.30 A.M. failed equally with heavy losses, and further feeble efforts were easily dealt with.²

Against the 4th Australian Division the attack was of an altogether different nature, being preceded by a short intense bombardment which reached far back in the sector and then was continued with little abatement until evening. The position held by the 12th Brigade (Br.-General J. Gellibrand) along the curve of the railway had been admitted by the corps commander to be untenable if strongly attacked, and the main line had therefore originally been sited on the hill above. During the bombardment the enemy began working forward in a mist, which limited visibility to a hundred and fifty yards; and then at 9.30 A.M. he advanced, mainly north of Dernancourt, against the 12th Australian Brigade, which had suffered most from the bombardment.³ After a struggle of about half an hour a party of the enemy broke through its southern flank where the railway embankment had received a terrible concentration of fire from trench mortars hidden in the village. The curve of the line enabled the enemy who had penetrated to fire into the backs of the men on either side of the breach; and, bringing up field guns through it, he gradually drove the garrison towards the flanks and actually captured the support trench in the left sector. In spite of this mishap the companies on each flank managed to hang on until nearly 4 P.M. Owing to the difficulty of communication down the forward slope, it took a long time to re-establish control of the situation, but by 3 P.M. a new line of posts and trenches—along the top of the slope from 500 to 1,000 yards in rear of the line occupied in the morning—was taken up.⁴

¹ The infantry attack of the *Second Army* began at 8 A.M., and that of the *Seventeenth* not until 9 A.M. Rupprecht ii., p. 371.

² The attack of the German *13th Division* was directed against Buire and Treux. It is said to have failed on account of the artillery bombardment having been ineffective and the ground too open.

³ The attack was made by the *50th Reserve Division*, whilst on its right the *79th Reserve Division* tried to break through in order to turn the whole Australian line from the north by pushing down the Albert—Amiens road.

⁴ The *50th Reserve Division* accounts state that it had done what had been asked of it, but it looked in vain on its flanks for the *13th* and *79th Reserve Divisions*.

In the meantime, Major-General Sinclair-MacLagan had been arranging a series of counter-attacks to meet the varying situation: finally, one was made at 5.15 P.M. by four battalions, three of them weak owing to casualties sustained during the day. An artillery barrage was dropped at the same time on the German front troops along the Buire—Albert road, and on the quarry in which their reserves were sheltering, lifting six minutes later to a line five hundred yards in rear. The losses incurred during the advance were very severe, but two hundred yards from the enemy the Australians made a charge which caused the Germans to fall back in disorder, the men from the quarry having already dribbled away.¹ It had been the intention to carry the counter-attack as far as the railway embankment; but, in view of the heavy losses, and the impossibility of attacking down the slope in sight of the enemy, this project was abandoned, and soon after 6 P.M. the troops began to consolidate the position which they had reached astride and along the Buire—Albert road. At dusk the situation quieted down, the infantry action grew less and less, and finally ceased. At the cost of heavy casualties the enemy had gained nothing but a narrow belt of ground.

The five-mile front of the V. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe) from Albert to Hamel, along the Ancre, was held by three weak and tired divisions, the 12th, 47th and 63rd, as the 2nd and 17th had been withdrawn to reorganize. The corps, however, had in reserve the 38th Division transferred from the First Army on the night of the 31st March/1st April. Nearly half of the infantry was in the front line, and artillery support was abundant. The attack was made by four German divisions, most of which, as a rule, had not closed up.² Covered by outposts, they started at a distance of a thousand yards or more from the British line. Here also an advance was made before the bombardment ended; for at 8.30 A.M. the centre of Major-General Gorrings's 47th Divn, which had four battalions (1/15th, 1/20th, 1/23rd and 1/24th London) in the front position in the southern end of Aveluy Wood, was forced back. When at 9 A.M. the general attack began,

¹ "Res. Regt. No. 230." Reserves of all three regiments of the division were in this pit.

² By the northernmost regiment of the 79th Reserve, which was to advance from Albert, the 3rd Marine, 27th, 107th, and the greater part of the 21st Reserve. None of these were fresh, all, except the 3rd Marine (which had been in third line), having been in first line on 21st March.

a penetration was also effected in the front of Major-General Scott's 12th Divn (35th and 36th Bdes, with a total of four battalions in the front position). But the invaders were ejected, and until midday the division held its front intact. About this time the Germans, under a fresh barrage, gained a footing in the front trench of the 36th Bde and proceeded to work along it southwards, capturing a small orchard half a mile north of Albert railway station. But, after three counter-attacks, the enemy was deprived of all his gains except the orchard.¹ The 35th Bde had turned its right flank to join on to the new Australian line, and as this flank could be enfiladed, the right and centre sections of the brigade line were at night withdrawn about seven hundred yards.

On the front of the 47th Divn, there was heavy fighting in and around Aveluy Wood, the enemy dribbling men forward from shell hole to shell hole, and making great use of rifle grenades. He managed to enlarge a gap in the line of the 1/23rd London by driving back and capturing part of the left about 11.30 A.M., and then establishing machine guns behind the battalion. Nevertheless, though the Londoners were hard pressed, a front was maintained until, after two hours' struggle, the enemy ceased his endeavours and contented himself with shelling Bouzincourt and other localities close behind the front. About 4 P.M. two companies of the 1/22nd London tried to counter-attack, but, encountering heavy fire, were brought to a standstill. Towards 6 P.M. the troops of the 63rd (R. Naval) Divn (Major-General C. E. Lawrie) on the left could be seen retiring: a defensive flank was at once formed, and measures for counter-attack were discussed between Major-General Gorringe and Br.-General R. McDouall (142nd Bde). It was finally decided to counter-attack eastwards on the 6th, as soon as it was light. The attempt, made by two companies of the 4/R. Welch Fusiliers (Pioneers), failed under machine-gun fire; but at 10 A.M., when the Germans again advanced against the left, the counter-attack was renewed, and the enemy was driven back.

Against the 190th Bde (Br.-General A. R. H. Hutchison), whose three battalions held the 63rd Divn front, it was not until well on in the afternoon that the enemy made any impression and after heavy losses the retirement above-mentioned took place. Then the right battalion in Aveluy

¹ According to German accounts, the 79th Reserve and 3rd Marine Divisions had not gained a hundred yards.

Wood was forced back after hand-to-hand fighting. The enemy did not exploit this success, but he returned to the attack early next morning and got into the trenches between the 47th and 68rd Divns. Here too the counter-attack had been postponed until daylight. It was executed at 7.45 A.M. when the Germans were expelled, leaving 55 prisoners and 10 machine guns in the hands of the 1st and 2/R. Marines, and the original line was regained.

Thus against the V. Corps also, the enemy had gained nothing but a very small amount of ground at heavy cost.

The IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir G. M. Harper) had heavy fighting, and suffered some slight losses of ground, the enemy regaining La Signy Farm (where there was a post of 14 men) and part of Bucquoy. In the line were the New Zealand Division (Major-General Sir A. H. Russell), the 37th Divn (Major-General H. B. Williams) with the 4th Australian Brigade (Br.-General C. H. Brand) attached, and the 42nd Divn (Major-General A. Solly-Flood). Against them, the enemy sent more than six divisions.¹

Attacks were made against various parts of the New Zealand front at 8, 9.30, and 10 A.M. when La Signy Farm was lost, and 10.30 A.M., with a final but feeble effort at 2 P.M.; after that even artillery fire died down.

In the centre of the corps front the enemy's attack was forestalled by an attempt of the 37th Divn, at 5.30 A.M., to recover Rossignol Wood and the sunken road beyond it. The attack was allotted to the 68rd Bde (Br.-General E. L. Challenor). A creeping barrage was provided by six brigades of field artillery; four howitzer batteries were detailed to form a smoke screen and 15 heavy batteries to fire on trenches, approaches and strong points. The artillery of the neighbouring divisions was ordered to put down standing barrages on the flanks of the attack, and their infantry to make diversions by rifle and machine-gun fire. Eleven tanks of the 10th Tank Battalion were available: they were to advance in line, the infantry following forty yards behind them. Two machines were ditched before reaching the jumping-off line, and eight others met with similar misfortune soon after starting; the remaining tank reached the objective, did extremely good work, and returned safely.

¹ Part of the 21st Reserve, the 16th Reserve, 26th, 5th Bavarian Reserve, part of the 4th, the 119th, 1st Guard Reserve, and 17th. The 5th Bavarian Reserve was fresh, the 26th had only come into the battle on the 27th, the others had been engaged since the 21st.

The attack was made by two battalions, the 8/Lincolnshire and the 8/Somerset L.I. Despite the failure of the tanks, the former reached both its first objective, a trench four hundred yards distant, and the final one the sunken road half a mile farther on. Although it lost the barrage by waiting for the tanks, the Somerset also gained the first, but it did not reach the final objective, a trench running through the middle of Rossignol Wood, although the left of the two leading companies got very near to it. Before the reserve battalion could be engaged, the Germans were reinforced and news came of a German success at Bucquoy, so this battalion was held back to deal with emergencies. Orders were then given by Br.-General Challenor to make good the first objective; but the attacking battalions overwhelmed by bombs and fire had already fallen back to their starting trenches. The 4th Australian Brigade had sent forward a party to co-operate on the right of the 63rd Bde and to establish a post at "16 Poplars". This party got within thirty yards of its objective and remained there fighting until the afternoon, but withdrew when news came that the Lincolnshire had retired.

In the left sector of the IV. Corps, after four hours' bombardment, the Bucquoy salient was attacked at 9 A.M., partly over the open, partly by bombing attacks up old trenches.¹ This involved the left of the 37th Divn and the right of the 42nd. The first attacks were checked, one post which was lost being recovered by immediate counter-attack; then an advance made against the eastern side managed to break in, and by 10.40 A.M. the Germans had captured first the north-eastern and then most of the eastern portions of Bucquoy. Confused fighting ensued until 7 P.M.; but, in spite of counter-attacks, one of which at 4.30 P.M. recovered the north-eastern corner, the enemy held on, and retained the eastern half of Bucquoy, establishing himself on the street running through the village from north to south: his reinforcements coming over the high ground to the south were, however, dispersed by artillery fire.

Thus on the 5th April, the sixteenth day of the great struggle, the German offensive between Barisis and Arras **Sketches A, 12.** came to an end, just as so many of the Allied offensives

¹ By five "storm detachments" of the 17th Division from south and east. The 1st Guard Reserve Division, on the left of the 17th, was to attack and take Biez Wood, to the west, when Bucquoy had been captured. "Gren. Regt. No. 89" and "Foot Guard Res. Regt. No. 2".

had done, in spite of early success, closing with a few isolated, spasmodic attacks, the sure signs of an expiring effort. The assault had failed to attain a break-through. It was obvious that without another set-piece and greater artillery preparation, the new British line could not be moved, far less broken. There was even less chance of success against the French line, now held in force, very strongly supported by artillery, and with reserves freed by three strong American divisions, with a fourth behind them, having taken over quiet sectors.¹ Ludendorff had, in fact, on the 5th, ordered the abandonment of "Michael", the most formidable onslaught of the War, which aimed at settling summarily with the British before the French could come to their aid. Now the question was where would he try next.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 4TH AND 5TH APRIL

Maps 10, 11, 12. Sketch 12. The German attack on the 4th April was intended "to reach the line Chirmont [6 miles south-west of Moreuil, on the east bank of the Noye]—Blangy Tronville [5 miles east of Amiens, south of the Somme], and if possible secure the passages of the Noye at and north of Ailly so as to create a bridgehead on the west bank of the Noye. Already our [German] long-range heavy guns can bring the railway triangle near Longueau, east of Amiens, under fire. The more ground we gain, the more effective will be the bombardment of Amiens main railway station and the railway bridges over the Somme west of the town."²

Orders were issued on the evening of the 4th to continue the attack on the 5th, but it was then discovered that the Allies had offered "a particularly obstinate resistance."³

"The German Crown Prince reported that it was no longer possible to throw the enemy back over the Noye. . . . Nothing had been gained except a slight improvement of the Avre bridge-head, which, however, created a difficult situation, as nearly all the artillery had been sent forward to the western bank, and could be supplied with ammunition only by the greatest efforts. Then, too, there were enemy counter-attacks which extended as far as the *XXV. Reserve Corps* [between Montdidier and Grivesnes], whilst the left of the *Eighteenth Army* was left pretty quiet. In these circumstances, the continuation of the attack on the 5th April was not to be thought of."⁴

¹ A fifth division, the 32nd, was in France, but was employed as a "replacement division", to provide reinforcements for the others.

² Rupprecht ii., p. 370.

³ Rupprecht ii., p. 372.

⁴ Schwarte iii., pp. 414-15.

It had been intended on the 5th to press forward to Amiens on both sides of the Somme, the *Second Army*, being supported on its right and left by parts of the *Seventeenth* and *Eighteenth Armies*. Actually, the *Eighteenth* took no part, and although the *Second Army* ordered an attack on its whole front from Moreuil to Beaumont Hamel, in the hope at least of preventing the Allies from shifting troops northwards to meet the "Georgette" attack, very little was done south of the Somme, and north of the river only against certain localities, and by picked troops. All accounts confess the failure of the operations on the 5th.

"The final result of the day is the unpleasant fact that our offensive has come to a complete stop, and its continuation without careful preparations promises no success. O.H.L. also recognized this fact in view of the considerations put forward from the Groups of Armies and the Army commanders; in the evening Ludendorff ordered the attacks to be stopped: they were only to be continued where an improvement of the local situation demanded it."¹

Ludendorff² puts it: "The battle was over by the 4th April. . . . The enemy's resistance was beyond our powers. We must not get drawn into a battle of attrition. This would not suit either the strategic or the tactical situation. In agreement with the commanders concerned, O.H.L. was forced to take the extremely hard decision to abandon the attack on Amiens for good."³

To sum up: "Strategic success was denied to the "Michael offensive".⁴ Kuhl⁵ uses practically the same words, adding, "the great tactical success had cost heavy sacrifices, some ninety divisions in all having had to be engaged. The conclusion of the fighting left our troops, especially on the Avre, in very unfavourable positions, which led to extraordinary wastage."

¹ Rupprecht ii., pp. 371-2.

² ii., p. 600.

³ He calls the attack on the 24th April (see Chapter XXI.) an "attempt of the *Second Army* to improve its position at Villers Bretonneux".

⁴ Foerster, p. 291.

⁵ Kuhl, p. 137.

CHAPTER IX

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS

APRIL 1918

THE PRELIMINARIES

(Map 13 ; Sketch 13)

AFTER the repulse of the "Mars" offensive against Arras on the 28th March, the Germans in that area quieted down, and remained content with firing a few bombardments, mainly gas, evidently in the hope of giving the impression that they were about to continue the battle. They resumed work, now reaching completion, as could be seen on air photographs, on their preparations for attack not only near Arras, but on the whole front from the Scarpe northwards to beyond Ypres. Information which came to hand on the 2nd April seemed to indicate an imminent renewal of the attack on the Arras front, probably extending as far north as the La Bassée canal, to meet which the Third and First Armies had already been warned to make dispositions.¹

In the sectors north of Arras the British dare not run the risk of having to yield much ground. The front line lay barely fifty miles distant from the coast, so that a short advance by the enemy would put Calais and Boulogne, besides the mass of establishments, aerodromes, dépôts, dumps and hospitals, crowded together in Flanders, within reach of his guns. Behind the southern half of these sectors, within three miles of the front line, lay Vimy Ridge, the capture of which would place the enemy in a position to turn Arras from the north-east. If he then pushed on south-westwards he might succeed in overcoming the inertia which had paralysed his great front of attack, as indeed he had already sought to do by the "Mars" offensive. Lastly,

¹ See page 114.

behind the northern half of the front lay that portion of the coalfields of the Pas de Calais which was not already in the enemy's possession or under his fire ; and if the Germans broke into that area and turned northwards they might be able to cut off the British Second Army and the Belgians. General Pétain had admitted in writing to Sir Douglas Haig and verbally to the Supreme War Council that this was the most critical and, economically, the most important sector of the front.¹ Sir Douglas Haig had borne its significance in mind in his original disposition of his four Armies to meet the German March offensive.

In a normal year the muddy state of the Flanders plain would have prevented any offensive on a large scale taking place before the beginning of May. Unfortunately, as a result of a particularly rainless spring, the ground was rapidly drying up, and it was quite feasible for the enemy to attack. North of the La Bassée canal—at any rate, north of Armentières—a limited retirement, it is true, could be made without entailing the disastrous consequences of a withdrawal in the Arras—Béthune sector. There were, moreover, a series of strong lines of defence, some marked by canals, which could in part be covered by inundations. At worst, if the Arras—Béthune front held, the line north of it could be swung back : Dunkirk, Gravelines (line of the Aa), Calais, Boulogne and the estuary of the Canche, in succession, would in this case mark the outer extremity of the wheel. Arrangements had actually been made to evacuate the forward part of the Ypres Salient should circumstances demand it ; for a retirement thence, as already pointed out, would not only tend to upset any plans which the Germans might have formed, but also shorten the line and economize troops for use elsewhere.

The Commander-in-Chief had felt that it was impossible to weaken his forces to any extent between the Scarpe and the La Bassée canal. Accordingly, after sending to the Fifth and Third Armies the whole of the original G.H.Q. divisions, he had reinforced them with others mainly drawn from the northern part of the front, where ground conditions in March forbade a serious attack. These he had replaced gradually by divisions from the fighting area, after hastily bringing them up to strength as best he could with the help of reinforcements which had come straight out from England.²

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., pp. 16-7, 92.

² For their indifferent value, see page 204, f.n. 1. As a result of these

For the moment, in view of the concentration of a large mass of enemy divisions on the March battlefield, there could be no thought of diminishing the forces astride the Somme. "Michael" certainly seemed to be nearing its close; but the Germans still had a useful reserve in hand, so that it did not seem likely they would allow the operations to come to an end and once more stagnate in trench warfare without some further attempts to force a decision. They might well think that another blow would finish the British. If so, it must be delivered quickly before the French mass of divisions, arrayed between La Fère and Montdidier over against the long and exposed German flank created by the advance, could take counter-action. To discourage the French from using the opportunity which offered, on the 6th April six German divisions of the *Seventh Army* attacked the salient near La Fère created by the retirement of the Fifth Army, thus threatening the right flank of the new French line, and on the following days drove the two divisions holding it back behind the Ailette.¹

At the Allied conference held on the 3rd April,² Sir Douglas Haig had asked that the French should undertake an offensive as soon as possible in order to relieve the pressure on the British; but General Foch had done no more than issue a General Directive. On the following day Lieut.-General Lawrence, the Chief of the General Staff, at a meeting with General Weygand, Foch's Chief of the Staff, had again suggested that the French should either relieve some of the British divisions or ease the situation by a counter-attack.

On the morning of the 6th, the information placed before the Commander-in-Chief by Br.-General E. W. Cox, the head of the Intelligence Section, seemed to show that the

exchanges, on 7th April, the Armies, counting in them the G.H.Q. reserves in their areas, were constituted as follows:

Fourth (formerly the Fifth): 8 original, one from First, 6 from Second.

Third: 4 original, 6 from First, 4 from Second, one from Italy.

First: 8 original, 6 from Third, one from Second, one from Fourth.

This Army had received the 3rd, 34th, 40th, 50th and 51st Divns.

Second: 8 original, 5 from Fifth, 5 from Third. This Army received some of the most battered divisions, the 6th, 9th, 19th, 21st, 25th, 30th, 36th, 39th, 41st, 59th.

Cavalry divisions and the Portuguese are not included.

¹ This was the "Archangel" attack, by which it had been planned to support and extend "Michael" on the left, as "Mars" and "Valkyrie" were intended to do on the right. See Sketch 13.

² See page 114.

enemy's intentions were the capture of Vimy Ridge by turning it on both flanks, from Arras ("Mars") and from Lens ("Valkyrie", which was quite ready); while at the same time he might launch a surprise attack by three or four divisions against the Portuguese front, north of the La Bassée canal around Neuve Chapelle. Major-General Davidson, the head of the Operations Section, was therefore sent to General Foch's headquarters at Beauvais to suggest three alternative ways by which the French could assist: (a) by a counter-attack on a large scale to draw the German reserves; (b) by the relief of British divisions up to the Somme; (c) by stationing reserves behind the British about St. Pol, that is immediately west of Vimy Ridge. Nothing being settled, the same evening Sir Douglas Haig wrote a letter to General Foch requesting that effect should be given to one of the three proposals, as the enemy's objective still seemed to be the destruction of the British Army, this being the obvious purpose of his massing 25 to 30 divisions on the Arras—Béthune front. He asked for a conference next day at Abbeville, about 8 P.M.

General Foch had other plans in his mind, and on this day issued a directive for a joint offensive of the French First and British Fourth (late Fifth) Armies for the purpose of regaining the line Moreuil—Demuin—Aubercourt—Warfusée, that is, roughly, the position held on the 28th March between the Avre and the Somme. The preliminary movements were to begin on the 8th April. The French Third Army was to continue preparations for an offensive to recover the "massif de Boulogne la Grasse", the wooded heights south-east of Montdidier.

The conference asked for by Sir Douglas Haig took place at Aumale at 3.30 P.M. on the 7th.¹ General Foch was "most friendly but immovable".² To the G.H.Q. suggestions, he replied that the British must be prepared to face a very heavy attack: that the first thing to do was to block the door to Amiens, hence his directive for a combined attack of the French First and British Fourth Armies: when the door to Amiens was barred, and the German attacks on the British beaten off, he would consider the advisability of putting in a large counter-offensive from the south towards Roye. He declined to take over the British front up to the Somme or to place a French

¹ No mention of this conference is made in F.O.A.

² G.H.Q. telegram to the C.I.G.S.

reserve near St. Pol ; but, he said, he had ordered—he gave Sir Douglas Haig a Note to that effect—that a reserve of four divisions and three cavalry divisions should be placed as soon as possible in the British zone west of Amiens in the area Conty—Poix and northward, adding a request that the billeting areas available for these formations should be reported to him as soon as possible. This force, he said, would be in a position to intervene rapidly either towards Arras or Amiens ; but in case of a strong enemy attack against Arras, the French divisions should only be used to free the British reserves. General Foch admitted that the hypothesis of a powerful attack against the British between Vimy and the La Bassée canal, and even farther north, was “very serious”, but pointed out that one against the G.A.R. “appeared plausible”, and that the enemy was in a position to carry out both simultaneously.

Whilst the conference was actually sitting, a note was received from General Rawlinson, pointing out that he could not carry out the attack in conjunction with the French First Army ordered by General Foch, whose directive he had received, unless he were given two more divisions. General Pétain, too, had calculated that to make the two attacks simultaneously, towards Boulogne la Grasse (Third Army) and against Moreuil—Demuin—Aubercourt (First Army), the G.A.R. would require 41 divisions, and General Foch had decided not to allot to it more than 30,¹ since any more liberal allotment would exhaust all his reserves in the north. It was therefore decided by General Foch to give priority to the attack of the French First Army, and he asked that the British Fourth Army should do what it could to support its left. Sir Douglas Haig felt confirmed in his views, already communicated to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that the French could neither attack on a large scale nor give assistance to the British. Sir Henry Wilson had already moved in the matter. He had telegraphed earlier to General Foch as follows : ²

“ In my opinion, the proper course for the enemy to pursue now is as follows : place Amiens town and Amiens railway and junctions under his guns so as to deny all serious traffic, then mass an attack of 40 to 50 divisions against the British between Albert and the La Bassée

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 422-3.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 415, in error, says he “wrote” and gives a translation of the telegram.

“ canal. If the enemy does this and at the same time is prepared to give up ground in front of a French attack, I am quite certain the British line will not be able to sustain such an attack without the direct assistance of French divisions, or unless the French take over much more of the British line so as to enable Field-Marshal Haig to have many more troops than he now has in reserve. I am sure you have thought of all this as well as of the necessity for improving the communications across the Somme between Amiens and Abbeville. A strong French reserve astride the Somme west of Amiens is one way of meeting this danger, and taking over a good deal of the British line by the French is another way.

“ I beg you to think very carefully over this matter, as I am convinced the action I suggest the enemy should take is the most dangerous for us and therefore the most likely for him. No success to the French arms south of the present Somme line can compensate for a disaster to the British arms north of it.”

In transmitting a copy of this message to Sir Douglas Haig, he added :

“ If you agree with my view of the situation and if you think that your troops would not be able to withstand another massed attack of 40 to 50 divisions without the direct assistance of French divisions, altogether apart from a large counter-attack on their part or else by the French relieving many of your divisions on your right, then I hope you will not hesitate to lay your view before Foch, as you are fully entitled by the final paragraph of our recent Beauvais agreement.”

To this the Commander-in-Chief replied that he had placed his views, “ which are identical with yours ”, before General Foch, who declined to take over any part of the British line : the small French reserve which it was proposed to place west of Amiens, could not, in his opinion, intervene effectively at the decisive point : he suggested that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should come over to France to use his influence with General Foch. General Wilson came over early on the 9th ; but by then the enemy had attacked. To his telegram, General Foch had replied :

“ We are absolutely in accord as to the enemy’s probable moves :

“ (1) menace or approach to Amiens ;

“ (2) possible important attack on the British Army from Albert to the region of Arras.

"Dispositions have been made to meet these contingencies :

"(1) by closing the route to Amiens ;

"(2) by intervening in the battle of Arras with French forces."

Sir Douglas Haig had proposed that French reserves should be placed near St. Pol ; since there were, as he pointed out, serious administrative difficulties in the way of accommodating a French reserve in an area west of Amiens, apart from the inconvenience. The reserves and divisions of the Fourth Army were refitting in the very villages now wanted by the French for billets, and their removal to a less suitable strategic position would take some days.¹

To facilitate co-operation the Commander-in-Chief had proposed to General Foch on the 6th that a senior officer should be attached to his Staff to keep the British point of view before him.² At first General Foch said that he did not want such an officer, but on the 8th he agreed to receive Lieut.-General Sir John Du Cane, who was accordingly relieved in the XV. Corps on the 12th by Sir B. de Lisle.

Events were working towards another crisis, and there were not enough troops to meet it. The Intelligence Section had calculated that there were 199 German divisions on the Western Front ; of these 88 had been engaged in the March offensive and of the 31 in reserve and fresh, 16 were probably in the area between the Oise and Lille. From photographs taken in the afternoon of the 6th April, it was apparent that the German preparations north of Aubers, near the junction of the XI. and XV. Corps, were well advanced : in fact many explosions of ammunition dumps occurred when the heavy artillery of these corps shelled the area in the evening. Throughout the 7th, air observers reported the main roads opposite the Portuguese to be full of moving transport, whilst ground observers saw carrying parties bringing up ammunition to the support line. In the afternoon and evening, air reconnaissance revealed a great increase of train movements, northward from behind Lens and eastward from Lille. These movements might, of course, be feints intended to deceive. The appreciation

¹ The 4 French infantry divisions, 14th, 34th, 129th and 154th, which were to form the reserve west of Amiens began moving there on the 12th from various places : Clermont Marseille (near Beauvais), L'Isle Adam (on the Oise), Ecouen (near St. Denis, north of Paris).

The II. Cavalry Corps (2nd, 3rd and 6th Cavalry Divisions), as will be seen, was sent to the lower Bresle, and 3 regiments of heavy artillery and one of pack artillery followed the infantry.

² See page 1, f.n. 1.

issued by the Intelligence Section G.H.Q., dated the 7th April, summed up : " there is likely to be a converging " attack on Vimy Ridge from the north-east and south-east, " and it seems likely that a subsidiary attack north of the " La Bassée canal may be made, with the object of drawing " reserves to a sector where determined resistance by the " troops in the front line is not to be anticipated ".

On the night of the 7th/8th, an intense mustard-gas bombardment was fired south of the canal on the battery positions between Loos and La Bassée, as well as north of it in the Armentières sector, including the town, between Fleurbaix (4 miles south-west of the town), and Houp-lines (2 miles north-west of it), thus defining a possible attack between the canal and Fleurbaix. Otherwise the German batteries were strangely silent, and not to be drawn, which artillery officers regarded as significant. The normal visible signs of the mounting of an attack were few, and these did not show that one was imminent until the 8th, when an airman, descending through the fog, saw what appeared to be piles of road metal along the sides of roads approaching the Portuguese front ; and on the same day an air photograph showed tiny white marks, which were thought to be planks, alongside the streams opposite that front. Just before dusk on the 8th, very considerable movements of vehicles in rear of the enemy's lines were reported by observers on the XI. Corps front.

During a visit of the Commander-in-Chief to the First Army on the 8th, General Horne reported that every indication pointed to his being attacked next day : prisoners captured on the 8th stated that the mass of German reserves were opposite the Arras—Armentières front : the transfer of artillery northwards had been noticed : there had been a cessation of hostile raids between Bois Grenier (three miles south of Armentières) and Hulluch where officers' patrols of the XI. and XV. Corps which had penetrated deeply into the enemy lines, had been unable to establish contact : on the other hand, whereas south of the canal the German artillery was not abnormally active, north of it shelling had increased.

Sir Douglas Haig at once made another appeal to General Foch to relieve six British divisions in the Ypres sector, as far south as the Ypres—Comines canal, that he might be enabled to form an adequate reserve behind his left flank ; but the General-in-Chief only sent General Weygand to G.H.Q. to repeat that none of the British line

could be taken over. The disposition of the French Armies on the 8th April was : ¹

Between Switzerland and the Oise (La Fère) :

- 46 divisions in the line ;
- 12 „ in reserve ;
- 3 „ in transport for refitting ;
- 3 American divisions.

Between the Oise and the British :

- 18 divisions in the line ;
- 10 „ in reserve of Armies and Groups of Armies ;
- 10 divisions (one American) } in G.Q.G. reserve ;
- 6 cavalry divisions }
- 4 divisions in transport towards the area.

General Foch was aiming to increase the G.Q.G. reserve to 15 divisions, divided into three groups : Tenth Army (in the area behind Amiens already mentioned) ; Fifth Army (near Beauvais) ; and XXX. Corps (near the Oise, at the junction of the two main divisions of the French Army).

Map 13.
Sketch
14.

The British First Army, on which the German onslaught was to fall on the morning of the 9th April, contained six corps : XVII., Canadian, I., XI.,² XV., with the XIII. consisting only of one exhausted division, the 31st, in reserve. During the first week of April some minor changes, already noted, had been made in the composition of the Army ; but on the 6th an important one had taken place, the XVII. Corps, the left corps of the Third Army, being transferred to it, so that its front now extended from Houplines southwards to beyond Arras. The Second Army consisted of four corps : IX., XXII., VIII. and II., the last containing only the very exhausted 30th and 36th Divns. The transfer of the XV. Corps to the Second Army had been suggested by General Horne, on the grounds of the extent of his front, 34 miles, and the tactical disadvantage of the boundary of the two Armies being the Lys. This change, which was agreed to by G.H.Q., gave rise, however, to various problems, the main one being that, without some rearrangement of divisions, it would leave the Portuguese at the junction of the two Armies.

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 427.

² Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking and the Staff of the XI. Corps had returned from Italy on 15th March and taken over the front of the 55th Division and the Portuguese Corps.

The Portuguese Corps had held the sector Quinque Rue (which was still its right)—Picantin (in front of Laventie) throughout the autumn and winter. It was a quiet sector, and, being waterlogged in the rainy season, had been regarded as a safe one; for the experience of three years had shown that the ground did not permit of an attack on a large scale before the month of May. When, on the 3rd December 1917, Sir Douglas Haig had issued instructions to his Army commanders on the subject of the defensive attitude to be adopted in view of a possible German offensive,¹ and called for remarks, General Horne (First Army) had informed him that he did not think that the Portuguese Corps would stand against a German attack. The front of the corps was then shortened, its northern brigade sector (Fleurbaix) being, on the 20th December, taken over by the XV. Corps, and it was arranged in the defence scheme that the line of the Lawe and the Lys behind the Portuguese should be held by British troops. After General Smuts had visited the front at the end of January 1918,² he reported the weakness of the Portuguese sector, and the War Cabinet had directed General Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to enquire into the matter. Sir Douglas Haig, in replying to him, had expressed the opinion that if the Germans attacked, they would capture part, if not the whole, of the Portuguese area. In this case, however, the British corps on the flanks "would at once, on the first sign of attack, throw back and man a defensive flank to the rivers Lawe and Lys, and the line of these rivers would also be defended by British troops": provided these lines held, no great harm would ensue. But when, against all precedent, the ground of the Lys plain began to dry in February and March, it became advisable either to relieve the Portuguese or again to reduce the front which they held. As ever, lack of men stood in the way of either relief or reduction.

In order to permit of periodic relief of troops in the line, a reorganization of the Portuguese Corps (of two divisions) which was very weak—the 2nd Division on the 30th March being 399 officers and 7,059 other ranks below establishment—had been begun on the 18th March. As a result of the calls made on the First Army to send divisions to the Fifth and Third Armies, this had been suspended on the 24th March, and only resumed on the 5th April. According to

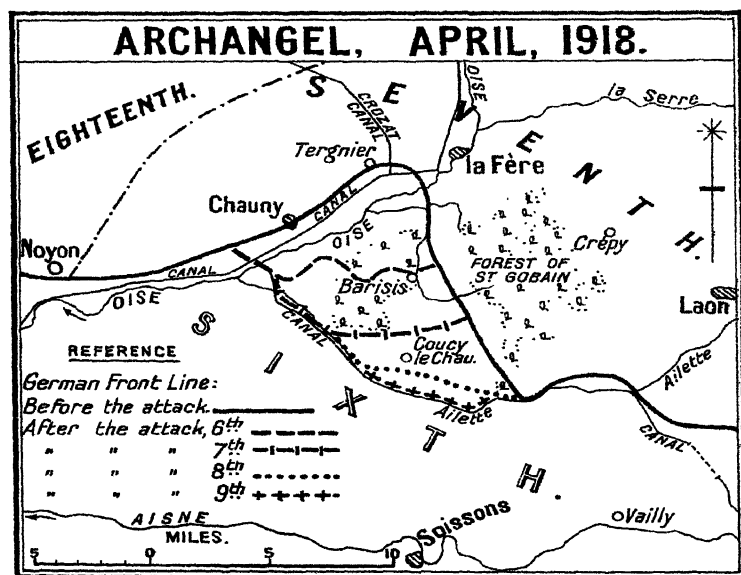
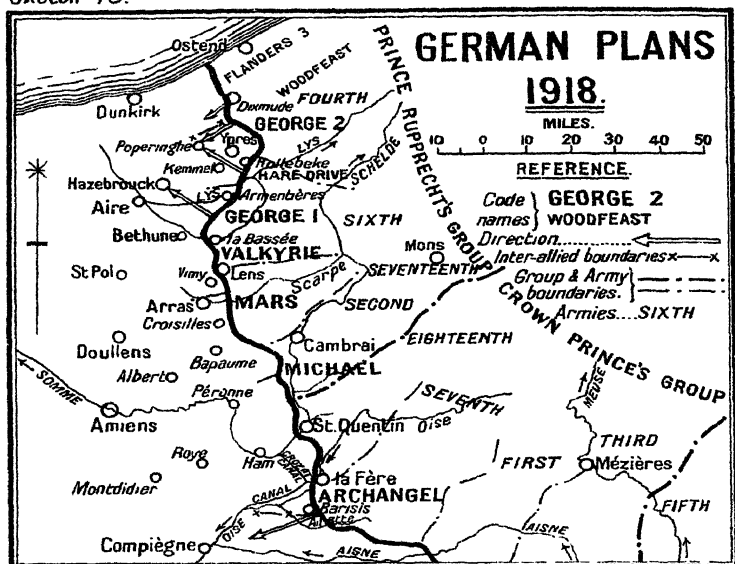
¹ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 37.

² See "1918" Vol. I., p. 40.

the scheme, the 2nd Portuguese Division was to be made up to four infantry brigades at full strength, three to be in front line and one in reserve, with all the artillery of the corps and of both divisions, and placed under General Gomes da Costa, a very capable soldier, actually the commander of the 1st Division. Corps and 1st Division headquarters, with the two remaining depleted infantry brigades, were to be sent, as depot troops, to a back area. The front was not reduced; but the 2nd Portuguese Division was informed that it had only to hold what had been called by G.H.Q. the Forward Zone ("A" and "B" lines, the troops called it), and that British troops would be sent to man the front line of the Battle Zone; the reserve brigade should, however, assemble on this line in order to counter-attack if "B" line were lost. By the 6th April, when—by re-division of the front—the 2nd Portuguese Division came under the XI. Corps, the 1st with its two brigades had been withdrawn to a camp at Ambleteuse (on the coast north of Boulogne). But the former had not been made up to establishment; the four-brigade division numbered only 21,000, with a fighting strength of 17,000, and was short of 139 officers and just under 6,000 men. Moreover, the spirit of the troops was very far from good. Lieut.-General Haking advised the immediate relief of the Portuguese by one British division, since in the event of their retiring it would need several divisions to restore the situation. In view of the imminence of the German attack, at a conference of the commanders of the First and Second Armies and XI. and XV. Corps on the 8th April, it was decided, with G.H.Q. approval, that the 50th Divn, which, on the 5th April, had come from the Fourth (Fifth) Army and was in reserve, and the 166th Brigade (55th Division), then south of the canal, should replace the Portuguese 2nd Division temporarily in the XI. Corps, commencing the relief on the night of the 9th/10th April; and that the XV. Corps should be transferred to the Second Army at midday on the 9th. G.H.Q. was asked to supply a division to replace the 50th in reserve. The 50th Divn was moved the same afternoon, the 8th April, from the XI. to the XV. Corps area; while the 51st Divn, from G.H.Q. reserve and just freed from the Somme battle, replaced it in the XI. Corps.¹ On the night of the 7th/8th, the I. Corps had

¹ The 50th Divn, also brought from the Somme battle, had been with the XI. Corps since 5th April, and had carried out reconnaissances, so that all units and sub-units knew where they had to go. The shift to a

Sketch 13.



extended its front up to the La Bassée canal, thus freeing the 166th Brigade and allowing it to be brought into divisional reserve. The beginning of the German attack forestalled the relief of the Portuguese, and postponed the transfer of the XV. Corps.

An arrangement was made between Lieut.-General Haking and Lieut.-General Du Cane (XV. Corps) that, in the event of an attack being made against the Portuguese, such reserve troops as both corps could muster should man the front line of the Battle Zone behind them. The XI. Corps was to hold the right of the line as far north as Bout Deville Post (a quarter of a mile south of the village, 2 miles south-west of Laventie) and the XV. Corps the rest. All the bridges over the Lawe and Lys from Béthune to Armentières were prepared for demolition, and a rehearsal of the duties was held on the 8th.

The German plans for the Lys offensive were as follows. *Sketch*
When, in the autumn of 1917, the objective for the spring ^{13.} offensive had been discussed at O.H.L., General von Kuhl, the Chief of the General Staff of the Crown Prince Rupprecht Group of Armies then holding the front from the Oise to the sea, had advocated that the main attack should be made between the La Bassée canal and Armentières, and directed towards Bailleul—Hazebrouck.¹ Ludendorff admitted that this might be effective, but pointed out that the ground presented obstacles and, further, that such an attack must be dependent on the weather: if there were a wet spring, it might not be possible to execute the attack before May, which was not early enough. His strategist, Lieut.-Colonel Wetzell, recommended it as "a second act" to "Michael". Preparations for the offensive proposed by Kuhl, with the code name of "St. George", were, however, allowed to proceed. The final decision that the "Michael" offensive would be carried out was made on the 21st January 1918; but Crown Prince Rupprecht was, nevertheless, directed to continue preparations for the attack between the canal and Armentières, to be known as "George I.": this might perhaps be combined with another near Ypres, called "George II." (with "Hare Drive" on the south and

new area, therefore, was unfortunate. The XI. Corps cyclists and 1/1st King Edward's Horse had executed similar reconnaissances, and the rapidity with which they reached their destinations on the 9th is very marked when compared with that of the 51st Divn, which was completely ignorant of the ground.

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., pp. 138 *et seq.*

"Wood Feast" on the north), and "Mars" and "Valkyrie" near Arras. There were many changes in the scope of the "George" offensives before the 9th/10th April when they were carried out.

On the 10th February, Ludendorff sent to Crown Prince Rupprecht the following somewhat confused order :

"Since O.H.L. has decided on Michael as the main operation, St. George I. and II. come into question only as a second battle-act, and then only if the Michael attack does not lead to a great break-through success, but is brought to a standstill by the British and French reserves hurried to the spot. A new general situation being thus created, St. George I. and II. will be built up by re-groupment of the forces, in particular the artillery, of the Michael attack. It will neither be possible nor necessary to carry out the St. George operation in the form worked out by the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* and with the effectives demanded by them. We shall, as a whole, have available nothing approaching the forces calculated by the Armies, nor be able to bring them up and engage them in the short time at disposal. So the operation on the left wing—Mars South and St. George I.—must be comprehensively reduced and [*sic*, "and" no doubt should be "or"] wholly abandoned, as more than 20 divisions, additional to the position divisions, for George I. and about 12 to 15 divisions for George II., cannot be made available in time. It can, however, be taken definitely for granted that the St. George operation on this basis [this apparently means with the number of divisions above mentioned] will have an overwhelming success as a second battle-act; for it may be reckoned with certainty that the mass of the British reserves will be attracted and held by the St. Michael attack farther south. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, as regards the St. George operation that St. George I. and 'Hare Drive' should go forward rapidly on both sides of Armentières towards Hazebrouck, and simultaneously 'Wood Feast' should cut off the Ypres Salient from the north-west [*sic*]. I request that you will have the St. George operations further worked out and prepared on this new basis, and that you will forward to O.H.L. as soon as possible the schemes of both Armies revised in accordance with it." ¹

¹ Rupprecht ii., pp. 326-7. The order shows signs of haste in its compilation, besides slight obscurities and changes of style: sometimes "St." is put before "George" and "Michael", sometimes not.

Crown Prince Rupprecht took this order to mean that, although "Michael" was the main attack, "George" might follow if necessary. It was arranged that the *Sixth Army* should make the attack "George I." against Hazebrouck; but, as it would only be able to count on an increase of a strength of 20 divisions, the length of front from which the attack could be delivered would have to be curtailed, preferably the southern portion. The *Fourth Army*, on the supposition that 12 to 15 divisions would be available, was to make preparations to launch "George II." simultaneously in three directions: "Hare Drive" from the south of the Ypres Salient against the Wytschaete—Messines ridge, to support "George I."; "Wood Feast" from north of the Ypres Salient, to cut off the British troops in it; and "Flanders 3" from Dixmude towards the Loo canal, six or seven miles to the west, in order to attract some of the Allied troops there.

Meantime, the two Armies had already elaborated proposals on a reduced scale, but still too large. Briefly, they contemplated a frontal attack against the British First Army, followed by converging attacks against the Second Army, intended to isolate and destroy it. It was thought that if the line of the Flanders hills (Mont Rouge, Mont Noir, etc.) between Kemmel and Godewaersvelde were secured, the Ypres Salient must be evacuated by the British. The scheme of General von Quast (*Sixth Army*) contemplated an attack with twenty-five divisions on the La Bassée canal—Armentières front, whilst the *Fourth Army* simultaneously attacked Messines Ridge and Kemmel. The *Sixth Army's* troops, having broken through, would attack the British forces in the north in flank and rear, and, with the help of the *Fourth Army*, destroy them. The right (northern) wing was therefore to capture Armentières from the south; the centre to push on and gain possession of the high ground Locre—Godewaersvelde, in order to get behind the British; the left wing was to protect the left flank of the centre portion, but also be prepared to turn south to roll up the British line. If these plans proved successful, the *Sixth Army* should then be formed into three groups, the strongest of which should move against Dunkirk and Gravelines, the second guard the left flank, and the third follow in reserve to Aire (13 miles north-west of Béthune).

General Sixt von Armin (*Fourth Army*) considered that the task of "George II." would be to attract strong Allied forces; to cut off the British in the Ypres Salient; and to

support "George I." by advancing to Messines Ridge. This last movement ("Hare Drive") was to be in a general north-westerly direction towards Poperinghe; it was the most important of the three tasks, and should include the capture of Mount Kemmel. "Flanders 3" should be launched simultaneously as a feint from Dixmude south-south-west towards Reninghelst (7 miles N.N.E. of Poperinghe), breaking at an angle through the Belgian front, and threatening the left of the British Second Army, already fully engaged with "Hare Drive". If "Flanders 3" could not be simultaneous with "Hare Drive", it should be delivered frontally against the Belgians, in order to fix their attention. "Wood Feast", the third attack, starting from Houthulst Forest, should be directed south-west against the northern flank of the Ypres Salient, having as its objective either Poperinghe or some point farther south, according to the position in which the British then were.

These schemes may sound fantastic to lay readers, but offensive plans invariably set forth a maximum; they may sometimes envisage failure, but they seldom take into account partial success; for that would usually open up an infinite number of possibilities.

Crown Prince Rupprecht, before submitting the above proposals to O.H.L., modified them to bring them more into accord with Ludendorff's latest ideas. The *Sixth Army* was informed that only 20 additional divisions, at the most, could be expected, and the *Fourth Army* was warned that the only part of "George II." which could, in all probability, be made simultaneously with "George I." would be "Hare Drive" (Messines Ridge). It was pointed out to both Armies that the "George" operations could only be carried out after transfer from the Somme area of such of the "battering train" as could be made available at the conclusion of "Michael".

The amended proposals were approved by O.H.L. with the proviso that the front of attack against Kemmel must not be too narrow, and that the breadth of "George II." must be sufficient to obviate such a possibility.

Such was the situation in the north when "Michael" was launched on the 21st March. It gradually became evident that a decisive success of this offensive might be ruled out of the question. As early as the 22nd, orders were given to complete the preparations for "Valkyrie" (Lens). Crown Prince Rupprecht hoped that the "Mars" (Arras) attack, followed a day later by "Valkyrie", would

make "George I. and II." unnecessary, especially as by the 24th the British seemed by their increased artillery strength to be expecting an attack where these would fall. The *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* were, however, directed to continue their preparations for "George I. and II." on a modified scale, to which the code name of "Georgette" was given. For this General von Quast received only ten additional divisions.

On the 26th, Lieut.-Colonel Wetzell urged Ludendorff to drop "Mars" and carry out "George" in its place; but on the 27th it transpired that, on account of difficulties of dumping sufficient ammunition and supplies, "George" could not be attempted for at least ten days.¹ "Mars" was therefore ordered to be launched on the 28th, with "Valkyrie" on the 29th. When the former failed and it was decided not to renew it, the latter was abandoned and "Georgette" again came into the foreground. The preparations for it were ordered to be accelerated so that it could be undertaken as soon as possible, the "battering train" used for "Mars" and ready for "Valkyrie" being released to take part in it.² O.H.L. hoped that even in its modified form a shattering blow might be dealt to the British. If the attack did not result in bringing about the war of movement so ardently desired, Ludendorff was firmly of opinion that the attempts to beat the British must be postponed until after diversion attacks had been made against other parts of the front, that is against the French front.

The modified plans had been forwarded to O.H.L. on the 26th. It was assumed, in accordance with O.H.L.'s views,

¹ It was considered necessary to accumulate 16 days' supplies and 4 days' ammunition supply before the beginning of an offensive, whilst the railways were overburdened and horses were short (600 per division on the average). Although the attack of the *Second* and *Seventeenth Armies* had been stopped, they still required 8-10 ammunition trains a day (not counting gas ammunition). It was calculated that Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group would require 30-35 ammunition trains (not counting gas) a day; but on 7th April the Prince reported that the arrivals on the preceding days had only been half what they should have been. Kuhl, pp. 150, 154.

² Ludendorff has said (p. 606), "The sooner it could take place the more likely it was to surprise the Portuguese in the plain of the Lys". General von Kuhl remarks (p. 150) that the idea of quickly regrouping troops for a second act as proposed by Lieut.-Colonel Wetzell is "very attractive, but very difficult to translate into reality". Conferences between Ludendorff and the principal General Staff officers concerned took place on 1st and 2nd April, and details were settled verbally. The 8th April was given as the date, but, at the request of General von Kuhl, it was postponed to the 9th, as the *Sixth Army* could not be ready before that date.

that "Georgette" would only be carried out if "Valkyrie" failed to roll up the British front from the south. The sector selected for penetration by the *Sixth Army* was the Portuguese front, and the breach made was to be widened northwards towards Armentières in order to compel the British to fall back behind the Lys. The frontal attack was to be delivered by four divisions: two others would protect the left flank on the La Bassée canal; two more would advance behind the right flank, ready to turn northwards after the front had been broken; the remaining two would follow the centre, in Army reserve. The plans of the *Fourth Army* remained as already stated.

After the failure of "Mars" O.H.L. directed that "Flanders 3" of the *Fourth Army* should be amplified, as "Flanders 4", so as to extend from Dixmude to the coast, and the *Sixth Army* was promised an additional seven divisions from the *Seventeenth Army* (making 17 in all, of which 11 were provided for the occasion), so as to strengthen "Georgette", and allow it to be made on as wide a front as possible. Ludendorff could do no more, since the March offensive had added 33 miles to the length of the German front in the West.¹ Emphasis was laid on extending the northern flank to Bois Grenier, thus adding the front of the 40th Division to that of the Portuguese as the objective.

The *Fourth Army* was informed that "Flanders 4" was not to be launched until after "Georgette", and that it was to confine itself to capturing the coastal area south of Nieuport if the forces at its disposal seemed insufficient to do more.

On the 3rd April, Crown Prince Rupprecht's headquarters issued general directions for the conduct of the "Georgette" operations, providing for various contingencies, and giving the sequence of lines to be gained, with special warnings as regards protection of the flanks. The main weight of the *Sixth Army* was to be directed towards Hazebrouck, with flank guards, facing south, on the La Bassée canal to beyond Aire (13 miles north-west of Béthune). The *Fourth Army* was to be ready to advance against Messines Ridge as soon as the British front north

¹ Three corps staffs, 7 foot artillery regimental staffs, 94 Army field batteries, 130 heavy batteries, 7 super-heavy batteries, 18 aviation flights (649 planes), 7 balloon sections, 6 trench mortar battalions, 12 trench mortar companies, besides numerous engineer and signal units, were sent to the *Sixth Army* so that, in addition to the divisional artillery, it had in all 105 Army field batteries, 206 heavy batteries and 24 super-heavy batteries. Kuhl, pp. 152-3.

of Armentières began to waver ; if this operation went well the attacks farther north, "Wood Feast" and "Flanders 4", would take place to exploit the success already gained.

On the 6th April, the "Archangel" attack against the French near La Fère, at the other extremity of the battle line, was initiated in order to draw attention to that quarter.

On the 8th April, O.H.L. recognized that to make the offensive of the *Fourth Army* depend on the measure of success attained by the *Sixth Army* would diminish the striking power of the attack. On the evening of that day it gave orders that the *Fourth Army* should advance to the assault on the 10th April, the day following that of the *Sixth Army*.

"Enveloped on both flanks it was expected that the enemy position between Frélinghien and Fromelles, with the town of Armentières, would fall without being directly attacked."

CHAPTER X

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS

9TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLE OF ESTAIRES ¹

(Maps 13, 14, 15 ; Sketches B, 14, 15, 16, 17)

Map 13. A GENERAL description of Flanders has been given in an earlier volume ; ² it is therefore unnecessary to do more than recapitulate the topographical features which influenced the campaign in April 1918. A line drawn from Vimy Ridge and Notre Dame de Lorette, near Arras, to Cape Blanc Nez (west of Calais) marks roughly the north-eastern edge of the plateau, some five hundred feet above sea level, which stretches between the valley of the Somme and the Flanders plain, overlooking all the low country to the northward. At the foot of the slopes and spurs which buttress the plateau on this side runs a continuous line of waterways : the Deule, Aire—La Bassée, and the Calais canals, passing through Douai, Béthune, Aire, St. Omer and Calais. North-eastward of this canal line the Flanders plain begins, and extends to the sea, bounded on the eastern side by a line of low ridges which, beginning near Aubers—Herlies, extends past the western side of Lille to Perenchies. It is nearly dead flat, but the eastern half is divided into two parts from west to east by a range of hills with conspicuous summits, rising to 300-350 feet above the plain

¹ In the official Battle Nomenclature eight local names are allotted to the Battles of the Lys : Estaires (9th-11th April) ; Messines 1918 (10th-11th April) ; Hazebrouck (12th-15th April) ; Bailleul (13th-15th April) ; First Kemmel Ridge (17th-19th April) ; Béthune (18th April) ; Second Kemmel Ridge (25th-26th April) ; and the Scherpenberg (29th April) ; with two subsequent actions, La Becque (28th June) and Meteren (19th July).

² See " 1914 " Vol. II., pp. 73-6.

and commanding extensive observation on both sides ; these Flanders hills therefore possess great military importance. The summits are, Cassel, Mont des Cats, Mont Noir, Mont Rouge, Scherpenberg and Mount Kemmel. At this last point the range changes direction northwards through Wytschaete and, gradually losing height, passes round the eastern side of Ypres, finally merging into the plain near Dixmude.

South of the Flanders hill range, the plain is traversed by the river Lys, which, rising west of Aire, passes by that town (where it is navigable for barges of 5 feet beam, drawing 2 feet), through Merville (where the depth is 6 feet, 6 inches), Estaires, Armentières (where it is 15 yards wide), Warneton and Comines, and thence eastwards to the Schelde. At Comines the Lys plain is so reduced in width and hemmed in by small hills on either side, that in rainy weather the part lying west of this outlet is usually so flooded that it narrowly escapes becoming a great lake. The Lys has various tributaries, the principal of which are the Bourre (from Hazebrouck), the Clarence (from Lillers), and the Lawe (canalized from Béthune to Estaires, 15 yards wide, and 6 feet deep, running in a wide shallow cutting, with the Louanne and Loisne feeding it). North of the hills several small streams drain towards the Yser. The La Bassée canal is also some fifteen yards wide ; south-west of it some high ground at Mount Bernenchon and Hinges commands the plain to the north, but the other canals are difficult to defend owing to the groups of houses situated close to the banks on both sides. The Forest of Nieppe in 1918 was dense and impassable except by the numerous rides ; a line of defence through it, facing south-east, had been constructed in 1915.

The surface soil is everywhere clay. The water-table, or level of subsurface water, is always fairly high, and any depression or excavation quickly fills with water.¹ Near the rivers and canals there are large grass fields, many of them fashioned into a series of ridges and furrows to facilitate drainage, the higher parts thus offering slight command for machine-gun positions. They are divided by drainage dykes, generally too wide to be jumped and too deep and muddy to be forded, and often bordered by thick thorn hedges. Elsewhere the ground is under cultivation : in April 1918 the spring wheat was well up. The many

¹ The craters of the Messines mines are now large ponds, with a water surface only a few inches below ground level.

hedgerows, studded with trees, presented covered lines of approach, but entirely prevented ground artillery observation, although O.P.'s in the upper parts of houses afforded reasonably good view. Artillery and wheeled vehicles could not move across country, as the surface of the ground was quickly churned by traffic into deep gluey mud, and there were many dykes and ditches : thus the roads were of great importance, and most of them only permitted one-way traffic. In this area, so different from the open downs of the Somme country, the fighting was carried out not at ground level from trenches, as on most of the front, but above ground from behind breastworks and hedges.

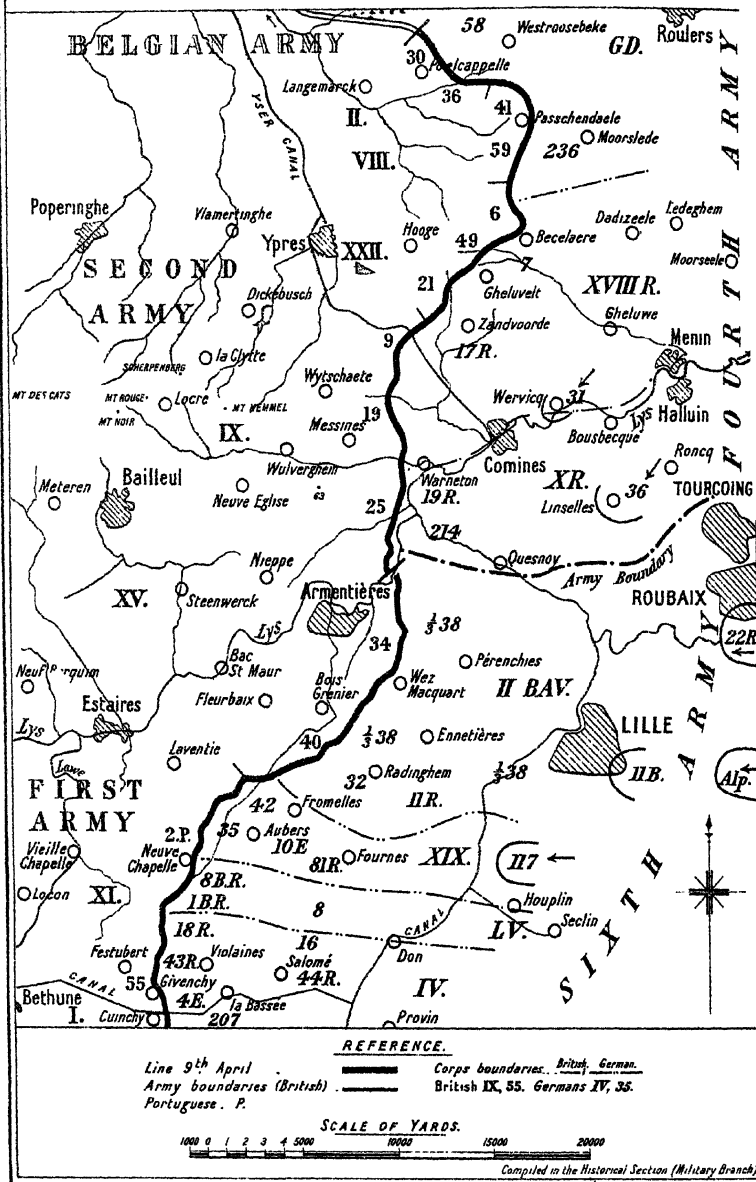
Hazebrouck, it will be seen from the map, is an important railway centre, with lines radiating from it to Lille, Merville, Béthune, Boulogne, Calais, Dunkirk and Ypres. Armentières is a manufacturing town, covering a considerable area ; Bailleul, Estaires and Merville are old market towns ; Neuf and Vieux Berquin, ribbon developments a mile long ; the other villages are small and surrounded by orchards, hedges and elm trees ; those on the rivers Lawe and Lys contained very old houses, well built of grey stone.

In general, according to experience gained in 1917, the difficulties of movement in Flanders left the balance of advantage in favour of the defence, only to be overcome by the engagement of considerable numerical superiority in men and guns ; but during the early part of 1918 the weather had been exceptionally dry, with the result that movement was easier than it had been in any other spring of the War years. As regards key-points, Mount Kemmel was of signal importance to an attacker, as it gave access to the dominating hill range, whilst the seizure or bombardment of Hazebrouck would strike a fatal blow at the communications of the defender.

The British front, starting from Givenchy (in April 1918 a few heaps of brickdust with, here and there, a stump of wall) near the La Bassée canal, ran as far as Houplines (just beyond Armentières) on the eastern side of the river Lys. Though well dyked and drained—and the British since 1914 had done much to keep the water-level down—the basin of the Lys above Menin is so water-logged that trenches, or any shelters below the surface, except at a few places where there were patches of blue clay, were impossible to construct, so that breastworks, whole or partial, standing up above ground level formed, as has been said, the only protection.

Sketch 14.

THE LYS, 9TH APRIL, 1918.



Givenchy, situated on a small elevation, was an exception; there trenches had been made, and even mining carried out. This height, small as it was, made it a useful observation station, but mainly over the British defences; its retention was therefore of great importance. The front line had hardly altered since the winter of 1914/15, both sides having recognized the difficulties of fighting in this area, and it had been so quiet that the inhabitants had returned and were cultivating the soil within two or three thousand yards of the front. The German positions which lay on the slopes of the Aubers—Perenchies ridge were, however, drainable and fairly dry, and the higher ground afforded observation over the marshy plain to the westward.

At Houplines the British front line crossed over to the western bank of the Lys, and leaving the much battered town of Armentières in a widish salient, ran close and parallel to the river as far as Warneton. Here it passed, just east of Messines and five miles east of Kemmel, on to the forward slopes of the Ypres ridge, that is the favourable ground gained in the Passchendaele offensive in the previous autumn.

The German attack on the 9th April fell on the centre and left wing of the First Army (General Sir Henry Horne). Its XI. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking) and XV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir J. P. Du Cane) held the water-logged sector between the La Bassée canal and Houplines, the 17 miles being divided equally between them. The attack did not extend to the right of the Second Army until next day. As will be seen from the map and sketch, the XI. Corps had the 55th Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine) and Portuguese 2nd Division (General Gomes da Costa) in front line, with the 51st Divn (Major-General G. T. C. Carter-Campbell) in reserve near Busnes. The XV. Corps had the 40th Divn (Major-General J. Ponsonby) and 34th Divn (Major-General C. L. Nicholson) in front line, and the 50th Divn (Major-General H. C. Jackson) in reserve in and behind Estaires. The 55th Division, after the Cambrai battle, where it had greatly distinguished itself during the German counter-attack, had been given two months' rest; but early in February it was moved to the Givenchy sector. The 51st, 40th, 34th and 50th Divns had all been in the March battle on the Somme, and had had no time to recover from their exertions, so that they must be regarded as "scratch teams" in which the officers and men, particularly in the infantry, were for the most part

Map 15.
Sketch
14.

unknown to each other, a not unimportant factor in the operations which were to follow.¹

Map 14.
Sketch
15.

The defences had been organized on paper, as ordered, on the zone system, the "Corps Line" becoming the front of the "Battle Zone", and the "Army Line", the "Green Line", but the ground between the front line and the Corps Line, having been long in British hands, was already well organized and bristled with switch lines, defended localities, machine-gun posts (some of concrete), belts of wire and wired hedges; gun positions had been wired and prepared for all-round rifle and Lewis-gun defence, so that they could be held independently if the enemy should break through. Armentières was protected by a circle of defended localities, and the passages of the Lawe and Lys were covered by small bridgeheads. The organization of the zone system, therefore, meant no more than the introduction of new names: in the XI. Corps sector the nomenclature was really ignored.

No risk could be run of losing Givenchy, and the remains of this village, standing on a knoll—an outlier of Aubers Ridge—cratered beyond recognition by the mining operations of the preceding years, lay in the so-called Forward Zone. The 251st Tunnelling Company R.E. had been engaged in elaborating its defences for several months; many strong-points and concrete machine-gun nests had been built with deep dug-outs adjacent; but a great feature of the

¹ The abbreviations of "Divn" and "Bde" are retained to show that the formations had been in the March battle.

For the previous casualties of these divisions, see Chapter XXV.

The 34th Divn (Third Army) had been pulled out for rest on 26th March; the 40th (Third Army), on 28th March; the 50th (Fifth Army), on 2nd April; the 51st (Third Army), on 28th March. They then had to travel north. En route, they received drafts of recruits, with a few old soldiers, which raised battalions from a strength of under 200 to 500 or 600, but with very few officers; some drafts, e.g. 150 for the 120th Bde, who had never been under fire before, joined on the 9th during the battle. There were, moreover, the gaps in the ranks of the officers and N.-C.O.'s to fill; clothing, boots and rifles to issue; transport to repair; new horses to replace casualties to be drawn; machine gunners and Lewis gunners to train; the guns to calibrate; and a hundred and one other things to do. The 50th Divn had just three clear days to carry out all these tasks; the other divns but a little longer. Many of the brigadiers saw their re-formed brigades for the first time on the march up to the battle.

The 34th and 40th Divns were without their artillery; the staff of the 34th Divn artillery was in the act of taking over from that of the 38th on the night of the 8th/9th. These divns were supported in the battle by the batteries of the 38th and 66th Divns. The 50th Divn had no artillery until that of the 34th Divn, which had just arrived, came to its support about 4 p.m. The artillery of the 51st Divn did not arrive until the evening of 9th April.



organization was a well-ventilated tunnel, three hundred yards long, connecting Givenchy Keep with Marie Redoubt, due south of it, off which there were dug-outs to accommodate two battalions, with forty feet of cover over them, and plenty of exits to the support line. Pains were taken to augment the already existing defences, and the men of the 55th Division were daily practised in leaving the tunnels and dug-outs to man their fighting positions with the utmost speed. Major-General Jeudwine, with the approval of Lieut.-General Haking, selected a "Line of Resistance" to be denied to the enemy at all costs. On the right wing of the 55th Division, this line was actually coincident with the front line; on the left wing, in which the defences were sandbagged breastworks in marshy ground, constantly levelled by German artillery fire, it was decided that the Line of Resistance must be set back and must run along a subsidiary line (front line of the Battle Zone) in front of the villages of Le Plantin and Festubert, known as the "Village Line". North of this, "B" Line, now nominally the rear line of the Forward Zone, averaging six hundred yards behind the front line, was the Line of Resistance, connected to the Village Line, on the one hand, and the Battle Zone of the XV. Corps, on the other, by switches.

Both in the XI. and XV. Corps saps were pushed out from the front line, and posts established in them to act as sentries.

As a whole the defence in the 55th Division depended on strongpoints for complete platoons, with old wire well hidden in the coarse grass, and much new wire which had been industriously put up night after night, so as to herd attacking enemy forces towards the zone of machine guns, all of which fired in enfilade and were protected on the front side. But great stress was laid on local counter-attacks: every platoon was either a garrison or counter-attack unit, and every man had been practised in his allotted task and taught to depend on his rifle.

The Portuguese held their front by a series of small posts at intervals in a well-constructed, continuous line of breastworks. As already mentioned, it had been settled that they could only be expected to man "A" and "B" lines—the latter to be the Line of Resistance—the reserve brigade being employed to counter-attack from the front of the Battle Zone, which would be garrisoned, if necessary, by British troops. Until a few days before the battle, nothing more than heavy raids had been expected against this sector.

The sectors of the 40th and 34th Divns—the former with over six thousand reinforcements in its ranks, the latter with somewhat less—were defended, much like that of the Portuguese, by strongpoints and breastworks of varying size. But the sector of the 40th Divn had been devised for defence by two divisions, one of which would be responsible for the Forward Zone and forward part of the Battle Zone; the rear line of this latter zone was the line of bridgeheads, which, with the line of machine guns on the north bank of the Lys behind it, and the reserve, should have been provided for by the second division. The 40th Divn, therefore, was not strong enough to garrison the defences, and had no men available for the special switch line which had been made near Laventie to cover the right flank should the neighbouring division retire. There were indeed so many trenches unoccupied that the enemy profited from their existence. The disadvantage of having a river in rear of the sector was lessened by the construction of many temporary bridges—pontoon, barrel and cork-float—which were moored alongside the bank ready to be swung.

The 55th Division, with its nine infantry battalions, held 4,000 yards of front; the Portuguese, with sixteen battalions, 10,000 yards, the 40th and the 34th, with nine battalions apiece, 7,500 yards each. The actual distribution of the troops (less artillery) is shown on the map for the day.

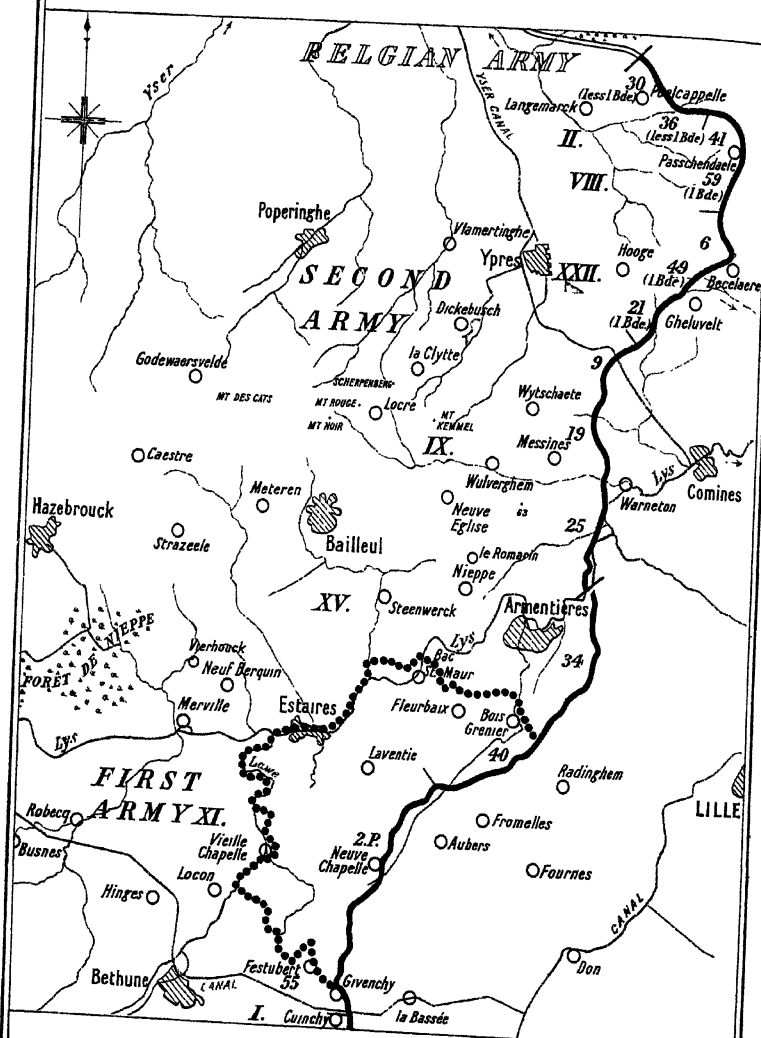
In all, counting by battalions (infantry of four companies, and pioneers of three), for comparison with the distribution on the 21st March, there were 22 battalions in the Forward Zone, 10½ in the Battle Zone and 11 in the Green Line.¹

The engineers, except in the 55th Division, were so weak, owing to their recent losses, that only enough remained to attend to the demolition of the permanent and temporary bridges, and the swinging and charge of the emergency bridges.

There was little choice of positions for the field artillery on the Lys plain; the batteries were therefore well scattered, and concealed from ground and air observation by trees and hedges, and by camouflage. All batteries were sited to fire obliquely to the front, with a few single

¹ In the Fifth Army, on the 21st March, the figures had been 36½, 43½ and 29½ ("1918" Vol. I., p. 130). That is, the Forward Zone of the First Army (XI. and XV. Corps) was more strongly held, half the troops being therein, whilst the Fifth, often reproached for holding its front zone too strongly, had almost exactly one-third.

THE LYS, 9TH APRIL.



Line 9th April
Army boundaries

REFERENCE.

10th April a.m.
Corps boundaries

SCALE OF YARDS.



guns—10 to 12 in each corps—well forward for enfilade purposes. The total of the heavy and medium guns was small, 122 in the XI. Corps and 78 in the XV.¹ Two out of the five brigades of heavy artillery of the XI. Corps were in support of the 2nd Portuguese Division, which had 64 field guns of its own. As the artillery of the German *Sixth Army* numbered 195 field batteries and 230 heavy and super-heavy batteries, it was at least four times as powerful as that of the defence.

The Intelligence map for the 4th April, giving the German order of battle, the last issued before the events of the 9th enabled further identifications to be made (the later figures are given in brackets), presented the following distribution of the enemy divisions from north to south: *Fourth Army* (coast to Armentières), 30 (33); *Sixth* (to Lens), 30 (28); *Seventeenth* (to Acheux), 15 (15); *Second* (to Hangard, the junction of the British and French fronts), 31 (33); *Eighteenth* (to Noyon, that is opposite the French First and Third Armies), 34 (32); *Seventh*, 10 (11); *First* (Reims in the centre), 8 (8); *Third*, 8 (8); *Fifth*, 6 (6); "*C*" *Detachment* (Verdun at its junction with the *Fifth*), 10 (10); *Nineteenth*, 4 (4); "*A*" *Detachment*, 5 (5); "*B*" *Detachment*, 5 (5). The last three, with four of the "*C*" *Detachment*, that is 18 divisions, 12 of them Landwehr, covered the long front of 160 miles from St. Mihiel to the Swiss frontier.

Throughout the night of the 7th/8th April, an intense gas bombardment, including mustard gas, had been directed on Armentières. It was estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 shells were fired into the town, and the 34th Divn had over nine hundred gas casualties, mostly in the 102nd Bde; the 207th Field Company R.E. and a company of the 18/Northumberland Fusiliers (Pioneers), which were working there, were practically put out of action.

The 8th, which was misty, was a quiet day. Such air reconnaissances as were possible noticed no movement in the German lines. This stillness grew so uncanny that

1	XI. Corps		XV. Corps	
	(C.H.A., Br.-Gen. R. H. F. McCulloch)		(C.H.A., Br.-Gen. C. W. Collingwood)	
12-inch howitzer	2
9.2-inch "	4
8-inch "	6
6-inch "	48
9.2-inch gun	2
6-inch "	4
60-pdr. "	12

Lieut.-General Haking said to his G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General S. F. Metcalfe, he feared the Germans would attack just as he was getting the Portuguese out of the line.

On the 9th April, as on the 21st March, there was a heavy mist over the battlefield, with a visibility at first not exceeding forty yards, and, as gas masks had to be worn for a couple of hours, the range of vision was small. The mist did not clear entirely till after midday, some accounts say not until 2 P.M. Shortly after 4 A.M., actually at 4.15 A.M., in the darkness and mist, a heavy bombardment with gas (phosgene) and heavy shells was opened on the back areas of the line between the La Bassée canal and Frélinghien, but mainly directed on the sector Givenchy—Laventie, that is the front of the 55th and Portuguese Divisions, with some further mustard gas shelling of Armentières. Otherwise the programme followed that of the 21st March; but less gun ammunition was fired, and the duration was slightly shorter, 4.15 to 8.45 A.M., instead of 4.40 to 9.35 A.M.¹ The principal targets were at first batteries, road junctions and all headquarters down to battalions, and the consequent necessary moving of brigade headquarters interfered greatly with command; shells from long range guns fell near First Army headquarters at Ranchicourt (12 miles west of Lens), but the headquarters of the 55th Division at Les Caudrons, south-west of Locon, escaped notice, and those of the XI. Corps at Hinges were not troubled until 4 P.M.² The first

¹ Rupprecht (iii., p. 375) says fire was to be opened at 4.30 A.M., the assault following at 8.45 A.M. Schwarte (iii., p. 440) and B.O.A. (p. 482) say 4.15 A.M., which agrees with the British records. The Portuguese accounts put the assault at 7 A.M.

From 4.15 to 6.45 A.M. all the guns were employed against the Allied batteries and communications, and, after a pause from 7 to 8.45 A.M., against the trenches and obstacles (B.O.A., p. 482).

The bombardment of the German *Sixth Army* was under the direction of Lieut.-Colonel Bruchmüller, the expert who had devised the bombardment of the Fifth Army on 21st March: but, as that officer points out, ("Artillerie beim Angriff", p. 191), there had been only nine days to prepare it, and on the former occasion the artillery had had seven weeks. But, according to Ludendorff (p. 607), Bruchmüller reported to him on 8th April that "all was in order", and B.O.A. (p. 481) states "everything had been thoroughly prepared for this attack for a long time".

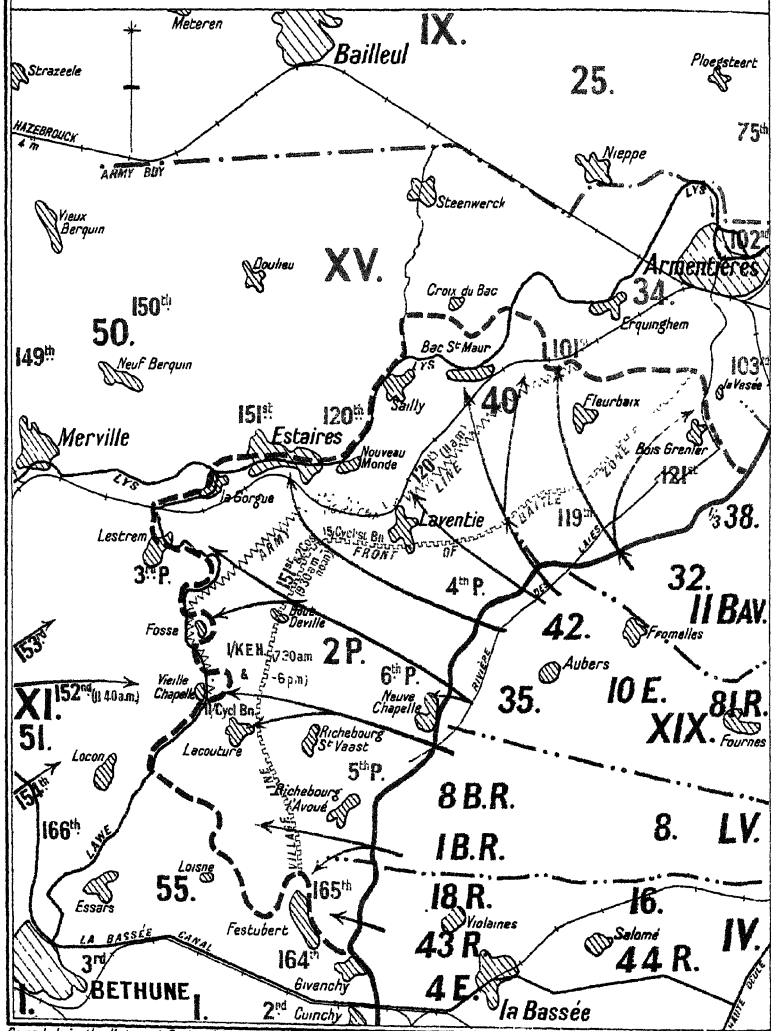
² The headquarters were moved to Robecq. The XI. Corps had been in Italy, and Hinges had not been used as a headquarters since November. It seems possible that the enemy heard of its re-occupation from prisoners taken early in the day.

The headquarters of the 55th Division had been in Locon, but as their position was shown on a German map captured in the middle of March, they were moved outside the village, to Les Caudrons, and the signal communication taken round it. Locon was heavily shelled on 9th April.

Sketch 17.

The break-in on the LAVENTIE Front

9th April, 1918.



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

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3050/305

British Red

Scale of 0 to 10,000 Yards

Portuguese P.

Ordnance Survey 1935.

Germans Green

shell which fell on Lestrem struck the house of General da Costa, and naturally upset the running of the Portuguese divisional headquarters for a time. Generally, except where otherwise stated, signal communications, mostly well-buried cable, supplemented by despatch riders, were practically uninterrupted during the day.

Counter-preparations by the heavy artillery were at once called for, and, there being no visibility, it fired by the map and calculation, as previously arranged, so as to enfilade the roads by which the Germans would be moving; the divisional batteries fired on their S.O.S. lines. The intensity of the enemy shelling suggested that a great attack was imminent: the men who had come from the Somme recognized its nature. But it was not until after 6 A.M. that probability became certainty, and orders were sent to have the bridges prepared for demolition in case of need. By this time the roads were under fire, and the areas around the bridges were being shelled with such accuracy that the bridges themselves, required by the enemy for his advance, were not hit.

The assault was made by eight German divisions in front line and six in second line. Of these, none had been engaged in the March offensive: thirteen came from rest.¹

As the fortunes of the day turned on the resistance of the Portuguese, their sector will be dealt with first. Against their three weak brigades in the front line were arrayed no less than four German divisions.² At 4.30 A.M., all wire communication from the divisional headquarters to the front being cut within ten minutes of the opening of the bombardment, and no news being received, General da Costa sent orders by a mounted A.D.C.—who took an hour to go two miles in the darkness and confusion—to his fourth brigade, in reserve near La Gorgue (just west of Estaires), to move forward and occupy its allotted position for counter-attack in the front of the Battle Zone. At 4.50 A.M. the British liaison officer at Portuguese 1st Division headquarters (Lieut.-Colonel G. de C. Glover) telephoned to the XI. Corps at Hinges and to the XV. Corps at La Motte au Bois (7 miles north-west of Estaires) that the situation

¹ The fourteenth, the *4th Ersatz*, had been in the line since January; the *10th Ersatz*, in second line, had recently been brought out of the line. One division only, the *43rd Reserve*, came from Russia.

² *1st Bavarian Reserve*, *8th Bavarian Reserve*, *35th* and *42nd*, with the *10th Ersatz*, which was to turn northwards against the 40th Divn, behind the right, and the *8th* and *81st Reserve* in third line.

looked serious, and it would probably be necessary to send up the British troops detailed in case of attack to man the front of the Battle Zone in rear of the Portuguese. Lieut.-General Haking therefore ordered forward his mounted troops, which were in reserve near his headquarters, the 11th Cyclist Battalion (Major D. P. Davies), to man the defences of Lacouture, and the 1st King Edward's Horse (Lieut.-Colonel Lionel James), to occupy a mile-wide defended area, south of Bout Deville.¹ At the same time, he sent instructions to the 51st Divn (Major-General G. T. C. Carter-Campbell), in corps reserve, to despatch one brigade—the 152nd (Br.-General J. K. Dick-Cunyngham) was selected—and a machine-gun company to relieve the mounted troops as soon as possible, when the latter would be withdrawn in support behind the Green Line.² Lorries had been provided at Busnes, four and a half miles away, ready to transport the brigade to the front; but by a mischance, it was ordered by the 51st Divn to proceed to Ham en Artois (2½ miles west of Busnes). There was loss of time in moving the column of lorries back, and it was nearly noon before the 152nd Bde debussed at Zelobes, just west of the Lawe.

About 6 A.M. General da Costa sent out all available officers, including liaison officers, to discover the situation and organize stragglers; for by this time the roads were already blocked with refugees and fugitives, chiefly artillery and infantry drivers and administrative personnel, but including some of the reserve brigade.

Lieut.-General Du Cane (XV. Corps) on receipt of Lieut.-Colonel Glover's message warned the 50th Divn (Major-General H. C. Jackson); later at 5.45 A.M. he ordered the despatch of the 151st Bde (Br.-General C. T. Martin), then quartered around Estaires, to the position assigned to it in the Portuguese Battle Zone, from Bout Deville to Cockshy House (close to Laventie), leaving the remaining three thousand yards, on the left, to be taken over by part of the reserve brigade (120th, Br.-General C. J. Hobkirk) of the 40th Divn (Major-General J. Ponsonby).³ All the

¹ The 11th Cyclist Battalion mustered 17 officers and 499 other ranks; the 1st K.E.H. 14 officers and 260 other ranks.

² As a general rule one company of the divisional machine-gun battalion was attached to each brigade, the fourth remaining in divisional reserve.

³ To prevent confusion, it should be borne in mind that the 51st Divn (152nd, 153rd and 154th Bdes) was the reserve of the XI. Corps, and the 50th Divn (149th, 150th and 151st Bdes) of the XV. In the course of the day, the two divisions found themselves alongside each other.

British divisional generals had, soon after 4.30 A.M., ordered their reserves to move to their battle stations; this in the 55th Division had the effect of bringing the reserve brigade (166th, Br.-General R. J. Kentish) forward to near Gorre, where it formed a defensive flank facing northwards between the Line of Resistance and the Green Line. The likelihood of a disposition of this nature being required had been foreseen and its execution rehearsed.¹

By 7.30 A.M. the cyclists—who left their machines behind Lacouture—and King Edward's Horse had occupied their posts between Lacouture—the village itself, being a well-marked target, was not actually occupied—and Bout Deville. On the right they were not yet in touch with the 55th Division, and on the left the 151st Bde had not yet come up. Behind the gap between these units the engineers and the officers and men of the staffs of the Area Commandants, with rifles taken from the Portuguese, guarded the bridges. It was not until 11.40 A.M., as we know, that the 152nd Bde, detailed to relieve the mounted troops, reached Zelobes, a couple of miles behind the right, and Br.-General Dick-Cunyngham then sent a request to the cavalry and cyclists for guides.

Between 6 A.M. and 8 A.M. the bombardment decreased in violence, owing to shortage of ammunition, but rose again at 8 A.M. to full fury now on the front position; at 8.35 the crash of the final ten minutes' trench-mortar bombardment fell on it; and at 8.45 A.M. the assault was launched.

As on the 21st March, German patrols had crept forward where they could through gaps in the front line before the assault took place, and as early as 7.30 A.M. large numbers of Portuguese had been seen by the British divisions on either flank to be drifting back; ² by between 9 and 10 A.M. the greater part of the Portuguese in the Forward Zone had passed through the British troops holding the front line of the Battle Zone, three miles west of the original front line. Most of the Portuguese 3rd Brigade, which, about 9 A.M., had come up from the reserve and occupied some of the posts assigned to it, evacuated them as soon as the fugitives from the front line began to pass through. A party of thirty, however, remained with the cyclists near

¹ A visitor reported that 166th Brigade headquarters office consisted of two wooden chairs under a culvert.

² Reports from the Portuguese field batteries show that their infantry began to pass through them about 8.15 A.M.

Lacouture. From German accounts, some posts in the front area, notably Richebourg l'Avoué and Neuve Chapelle, held out until nearly 11 A.M., and in the sector of the 10th Portuguese Regiment, on the right, a stand was made until trench-mortar fire had killed most of the defenders. But by 11 A.M. practically the whole of the Portuguese 2nd Division, including most of the field artillery, had disappeared from the battlefield; the heavy artillerymen working in the British batteries and the Portuguese Tunnelling Company under British officers alone remained as formed bodies.¹ Here and there, small parties collected by officers remained with the British troops and fought well, but as an organized force the Portuguese 2nd Division had ceased to exist, and its retreat had been so rapid that the firing of the demolition charges in the bridges and other works had not been carried out.

Although a Portuguese withdrawal had been anticipated, its speed upset all the carefully rehearsed plans for such a contingency except those of the 55th Division. When, shortly before 9 A.M., the enemy infantry attack was launched in the mist, under a very heavy creeping barrage, the Germans were able to get close to the trenches, within twenty yards, before fire was opened by the outposts of the British portion of the line, so news was slow in arriving at the various echelons. The situation as viewed from corps headquarters was long indefinite and obscure; but the intensity

¹ At 1.40 P.M. the G.O.C. Portuguese 2nd Division got the instructions of the XI. Corps to hold the line of the Lawe; according to his report, "by that time the whole of the division was either lost or scattered". There were subsequently assembled 394 officers and 13,252 other ranks. The Germans claim 6,000 prisoners.

German regimental accounts available, one from each division which attacked the Portuguese, contain the following:

"Bav. Res. Regt. No. 1" (*1st Bav. Res. Div.*):

"The trench garrisons surrendered after a feeble resistance; 9.50 A.M., the hostile strongpoints, where Portuguese were still offering resistance, captured."

"Bav. Res. Regt. No. 8" (*8th Bav. Res. Div.*):

"It was not until the third system was reached at 9.30 A.M. that, in places, slight resistance was offered and the first prisoners captured."

"Regt. No. 141" (*35th Div.*):

"First system taken without resistance. In the second, first prisoners taken. 9.45 A.M., stiff resistance at strongpoint V. captured and 70 Portuguese taken."

"Regt. No. 138" (in the divisional reserve of the *42nd Div.*) merely says:

"9.40 A.M. 1st System captured; 10 A.M. 2nd System captured."

The *42nd Division* was to break through all the hostile positions to the Lys in one rush and to cross the river.

of the fire induced Lieut.-General Haking at 9.40 A.M. to order the 154th Bde. (Br.-General K. G. Buchanan) northwards to Locon, that is near the boundary of the 55th and Portuguese 2nd Divisions in the Green Line, where it would come under the command of Major-General Jeudwine and be close to the 152nd Bde. This left only one brigade (153rd) under Major-General Carter-Campbell. It would probably have been better to have employed his division as a whole.

The three German divisions which attacked the 55th Division found the Lancashire Territorials fully prepared to resist them in spite of their easy entry into the Portuguese sector, every man being well trained to shoot and to counter-attack and knowing what was required of him.¹ The 164th Brigade (Br.-General C. I. Stockwell) and 165th (Br.-General L. B. Boyd-Moss) were in front line, with the 166th (Br.-General R. J. Kentish) in reserve. As early as 4.30 A.M. the two companies of the 1/6th King's of the 165th Brigade, and one company of the 1/4th South Lancashire (Pioneers), in brigade reserve, had been moved up to occupy two posts, Route A Keep and Tuning Fork, to cover the left of the Line of Resistance. Unfortunately, the platoon ordered to the former was nearly wiped out by a heavy shell, and the post was left ungarrisoned except for a handful of men. At 7 A.M. the 1/10th King's (Liverpool Scottish), sent from the reserve brigade, arrived at Tuning Fork and extended westwards to hold a switch trench and another post, Loisne Central. Thus, before the Germans attacked, a defensive flank facing north along the boundary of the division had been formed.

Between 7 and 8 A.M. Portuguese stragglers began to appear on the front of the Liverpool Scottish. They were followed by a few Germans. Soon after, the Intelligence officer of the 1/6th King's (165th Brigade), who had taken a patrol into the Portuguese lines, came in and reported that part of the 10th Portuguese Regiment, on the left of the battalion, had evacuated its position, and that he had seen German troops. A defensive flank was formed, and towards 9 o'clock large numbers of Germans appeared. Fire was withheld until the shape of helmets could be distinguished

¹ The attack on the 55th Division was made by three divisions in first line (*4th Ersatz, 43rd Reserve and 18th Reserve*), with two (*44th Reserve and 16th*) in second line. In reserve, behind the left of the attack, were four more, *12th Reserve, 48th Reserve, 240th and 216th*. According to captured documents they had been informed that the 55th Division was a tired one "only fit for holding a quiet sector of the line".

in the fog. Then the enemy was driven off by the Liverpool Scottish; but Route A Keep, entered from the rear, was lost, and for the rest of the day, in spite of artillery fire directed on it, was retained by the enemy. The outposts of the 165th Brigade, even some of the posts on the left of the Line of Resistance, were closely engaged soon after 8 A.M. by Germans who had penetrated by way of the Portuguese front. About 8.30 A.M., as already noted, the enemy began shelling all round the bridges of the Lawe and the Lys, as if to prevent the Allies using them but to leave them intact for their own passage.

In the general attack at 8.45 A.M., the Germans, in the fog, under the creeping barrage, the advantage of which they almost immediately lost, penetrated the front of the 164th and 165th Brigades at a few points; but all the posts of the 164th, even the advanced ones, held out, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, and breaking up and disorganizing his advance. Yet, towards 10 A.M., the situation became critical as the enemy had penetrated to the ruins of Givenchy church, and near the canal had reached the Cuinchy road. This, however, was the worst moment; the men in the strongpoints and posts in rear stopped further progress, and the counter-attack platoons gallantly drove out the invaders and restored the original front line; by midday only a few houses near Windy Corner remained in their hands.¹ Some assistance was received from the 1st Division south of the canal. When Major-General E. P. Strickland found that the Germans were not shelling his area, he sent a battalion (1/Gloucestershire) to line the canal bank, while some of his batteries pulled the guns out of their shelters to fire northward on the 55th Division front.

The 165th Brigade (Br.-General L. B. Boyd-Moss) resisted like the 164th. Its left battalion, the 1/5th King's, was attacked in flank from the Portuguese sector as early as 8.30 A.M. A quarter of an hour later, when the general attack was launched against it, the outpost line fell back fighting, according to plan, first to the "Old British Line", a line of breastworks half-way between the front line and the Line of Resistance, only a few of the men on the left being cut off. Subsequently the outpost troops of the

¹ For their behaviour during this fighting, in which they both were killed, 2/Lieut. J. H. Collin, 1/4th King's Own, and 2/Lieut. J. Schofield, 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, were posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

brigade retired, as arranged, to the Line of Resistance itself, where the battalions were established before the Germans began to attack it frontally about midday.

Not until 10 A.M. did the first definite news of the evacuation of the front line by the Portuguese reach the XI. Corps; and it was about 11.30 A.M. when the confirmation of their general retirement arrived both from the British liaison officer, still at Lestrem, and from the XV. Corps. Lieut.-General Haking thereupon ordered his last reserve, the 153rd Bde (Br.-General A. T. Beckwith), to Pacaut (5 miles north of Béthune) to cover the junction of the XI. and XV. Corps behind the Lawe. This last move provided for the 51st Divn deploying in line, from south to north, the 154th, 152nd and 153rd Bdes on a front of three miles behind the right sector of the old Portuguese front; the 50th Divn of the XV. Corps was similarly to cover the left sector. At the same time, Lieut.-General Haking sent orders to the Portuguese 2nd Division to hold the crossings over the Lawe, and rally all fugitives, clear of the roads, west of the river. The latter order was imperative, as crowds of Portuguese troops and refugees impeded all movement on the roads.

In the XV. Corps, the attack had fallen on the 40th Divn (Major-General J. Ponsonby), headquarters at Croix du Bac (4 miles north-east of Estaires).¹ At first the roar of bombardment, heard soon after 4 A.M., was thought to be connected with a raid which was to be made by two companies of the 20/Middlesex (121st Bde) at that hour; but this notion was soon dispelled. At 4.45 A.M., Br.-General H. H. S. Knox (B.G.G.S. XV. Corps), at Lieut.-General Du Cane's direction, telephoned warning orders to the 40th and 50th Divns to have the 120th and 151st Bdes ready to move at once, the latter with the corps cyclists (2 companies), with a view to manning part of the front line of the Battle Zone from Bout Deville to Laventie (exclusive) behind the Portuguese, as arranged. An hour later he ordered the 151st Bde and the cyclists to their destination. At 6.15 A.M., the 120th Bde (10th/11th and 14/Highland L.I. and 2/R. Scots Fusiliers), which was to hold the front line of the Portuguese Battle Zone from

¹ In front line: 119th Bde (Br.-General F. P. Crozier); 121st Bde (Br.-General J. Campbell).

In reserve near Estaires: 120th Bde (Br.-General C. J. Hobkirk), who had taken command on 23rd March; the brigade-major had arrived only on the 28th.

Laventie (inclusive) eastwards, moved to a position of assembly south-east of Sailly sur la Lys,¹ and at 7.50 A.M. it went forward to the Battle Zone. As will be seen, this move was anticipated by the Germans. The other two brigades of the 50th Divn, the 149th (Br.-General E. P. A. Riddell) and 150th (Br.-General H. C. Rees), were brought close up to Estaires at 6.30 A.M. Preceded by the cyclists, the 6/Durham L.I., the leading battalion of the 151st Bde, reached the Battle Zone about 9.30 A.M.² The other two battalions of the brigade, 8th and 5/Durham L.I., held the crossings over the Lawe and the Lys.

As soon as the bombardment began, the 119th Bde (40th Divn), standing to the left of the Portuguese, had formed a defensive flank. By 6 A.M. troops, at first thought in the fog to be Germans but later found to be Portuguese, were seen passing westwards. Owing to the difficulty of distinguishing friend from foe—the men of the 40th Divn had never seen the greenish uniform of the Portuguese troops until a few days before—repeated mistakes were made and so fire was withheld. This uncertainty enabled the Germans, who were following up the retreating Portuguese, to press on past the flank of the 119th Bde about 7.30 A.M. with almost complete immunity.³ Some of them, turning northwards, enveloped from flank and rear, first the 18/Welch, the right of the brigade, so that only two officers and 20 men escaped to the Battle Zone, and then the 13/East Surrey, which, surrounded on three sides soon after 9 A.M., continued to fight stoutly, some of the strong-points occupied by the battalion holding out until the afternoon. Br.-General Crozier ordered his reserve, the 21/Middlesex, to move up; but, owing to the heavy fire, half of it got no farther than Fleurbaix, and the rest fell back with the survivors of the 18/Welch, eventually on Sailly. The next unit in the line to feel the enemy pressure was the 20/Middlesex, the right of the 121st Bde. Attempts were made to form a defensive flank, but the battalion, weakened by the loss of the two companies which had taken

¹ Henceforth in the narrative it will be called Sailly.

² A shell having fallen on the billets of the 6/Durham L.I. early in the morning, 14 officers were killed and wounded, and the battalion went into action with only 3 officers, not counting the commanding officer and the adjutant.

³ The 119th Bde was attacked by the *32nd Division*, with the *11th Reserve Division* in second line, the *38th Division* covering the rest of the XV. Corps front; but there were 4 German divisions, *117th*, *11th Bavarian*, *Alpine Corps* (only the establishment of a division) and *22nd Reserve*, behind this flank.

part in the early morning raid,¹ was hustled back on the 13/Green Howards, next on the left. The reserve battalion, 12/Suffolk, in the defences of Fleurbaix was then ordered to extend eastwards towards the 13/Green Howards, and a flank facing south was thus formed. Reports, however, reached the XV. Corps that the enemy was in Fleurbaix. In consequence, first the 150th and then the 149th Bde, each with a machine-gun company, received orders to defend the line of the Lys from Estaires (exclusive) to Saily; to counter-attack if the enemy reached the northern bank; and otherwise to assist in establishing a strong line on the southern bank to prevent the Germans from approaching the river.

No attack was made on the 108rd Bde (Br.-General J. G. Chaplin), holding, with a reserve of two companies of the 11/Suffolk (101st Bde), a long front of eight thousand yards covering Armentières; but about 8 A.M. one German patrol of about thirty men managed to enter its area from the south, whereupon the reserve was used to form a defensive flank.

Delayed by the ditches and hedges, the fog, and the resistance offered by some of the Portuguese strong-points, it was not until about 11 A.M. that the Germans reached that part of the Portuguese Battle Zone for which the XV. Corps was responsible. This was before the 120th Bde arrived, although the 151st Bde was in position, and had established touch with the yeomen and cyclists of the XI. Corps to the south. The 120th Bde, finding that it had been anticipated, took position behind Laventie (from Muddy Lane in the Green Line towards Charred Post in the Battle Zone) behind a belt of wire entanglement covering some defensible houses, hedges and machine-gun posts, which had been organized some days before in case the Portuguese were rushed. But, with its flanks open, the brigade was in a position of some peril.

Thus within two hours of the German assault an entirely new situation had arisen. The Portuguese 2nd Division had left the field with most of its artillery; on the right of the gap thus formed the 55th Division was established on its Line of Resistance; on the left, the 40th Divn, weak and shaken after its experiences in the March offensive, and attacked in flank and rear from the Portuguese area, had

¹ Most of the men of these two companies were never heard of again.

been hustled back, but had hastily formed a new front through Fleurbaix facing south. Between the 55th Division and the 40th Divn a thin line had been formed in the front line of the Portuguese Battle Zone by the 11th Cyclist Battalion, 1/King Edward's Horse, and the 151st Bde; towards this line the 152nd and 153rd Bdes were moving up, whilst the 120th Bde, which should have continued the defence line northwards, was midway in the space between the 151st Bde and the rest of its own 40th Divn. Behind the new front of defence, the line of the rivers Lawe and Lys and the bridgeheads were held by reserves. The Germans, on this occasion certainly handicapped by the ground and the fog, were close up to the front of the Battle Zone, and were actually in it opposite the 120th Bde.

They were not to make much further progress on this day; but it was by no means for lack of effort. In several instances parties filtered through and approached within two hundred yards of field guns in action, which were pulled out of their pits and used point-blank against them, whilst the gunners opened with rifles and Lewis guns. In the 55th Division area, about 12.30 p.m., under cover of a trench-mortar bombardment, the Germans rushed a post (Plantin South) on the right of the 165th Brigade, threatening to separate it from the 164th, and to roll up the line from the south. To prevent this disaster, a defensive flank was formed by the headquarters details of the 1/7th King's (the right flank) and a company of the 1/6th King's (in reserve). A counter-attack was then made, and Plantin South Post recovered; a large number of Germans who were lying outside it then retreated in disorder, suffering heavy casualties. The 164th Brigade also counter-attacked and regained possession of the houses at Windy Corner and the whole of its original lines. Moreover, touch between the 164th and 165th Brigades was re-established.

When the fog began to thin, the lines of wire which had been so industriously put up by the 55th Division night after night were seen to be festooned with dead, whilst parties of Germans, including a band, which had penetrated into the two pockets at one time formed north and south of Givenchy, were found to be caught in them. A bar, as it were, had been drawn behind the intruders by the reformation of the line of the 164th and 165th Brigades; and no less than 641 Germans, with two battalion commanders, over a hundred machine guns and automatic rifles, and the band, with its instruments, which was to have played the

regiment into Béthune, were thus captured. Here, at any rate, "infiltration" had been suitably dealt with.

The German efforts to outflank the 55th Division round the left of the 165th Brigade from the Portuguese area had meanwhile been continued in the fog under a heavy barrage. The reserves of the 165th Brigade with the Liverpool Scottish of the 166th Brigade had already formed a defensive flank on this side as far as Loigne Central, although one post (Route A Keep) had been lost. Br.-General Kentish had directed his other two battalions (1/5th King's Own and 1/5th South Lancashire) to extend this flank towards the Lawe. Owing, however, to the fog, and the fact that his headquarters at Le Hamel were under gun and machine-gun fire and therefore difficult of approach, it was not until 12.30 P.M. that he knew and reported that they were in position; also that the situation on the left at Le Touret (2,000 yards S.S.W. of Lacouture) was obscure. Major-General Jeudwine at once gave orders that the 1/5th King's Own (166th Brigade) must take its position there, as previously arranged, and he informed Br.-General Kentish that the divisional reserve, three field companies R.E., Nos. 419, 422 and 423, the tunnellers of No. 251 Company, and two pioneer companies (1/4th South Lancashire), as well as a battalion of the 51st Divn (4/Seaforth Highlanders, which arrived at Le Hamel at 2.30 P.M.), were placed at his disposal to continue the flank to the Lawe and form a reserve. The pioneers were in fact already in position at Mesplaux Farm, west of Le Touret, and had stopped the advance of the enemy at not inconsiderable cost to him. The engineers arrived later. A couple of hundred Portuguese who had come into the British lines were also added to the defenders.

Severe fighting went on all the afternoon, but by evening a continuous flank, indented on account of the loss of Route A Keep, held by the 165th and 166th Brigades and attached troops, had been formed facing north-east, and touch had been gained at the Lawe with the 51st Divn. Behind this new defence line ran G Switch, while work had been begun on another trench a short way in rear of it.

The divisional artillery proved of splendid assistance, although, owing to the fog, Major-General Jeudwine feared it had not accomplished as much as he had hoped.¹ Moreover,

¹ The divisional artillery brigades, the 275th and 276th, under Br.-General A. M. Perreau, contained mainly pre-War Lancashire Territorials.

the roads in rear of the divisions had been kept under fire by the enemy, so that it had been impossible to bring up much ammunition, and the large dumps by the side of the guns were nearly exhausted. The full effect of their fire was not known until later. Prisoners stated that their front line and support trenches were packed with dead, showing that the counter-preparation and S.O.S. fire had caught the Germans massing or massed for attack ; British prisoners subsequently reported that about 11.30 A.M. a bombardment had fallen on a second-line division assembled in the German support trenches and nearly annihilated it, twenty-three of the prisoners being killed at the same time. One anti-tank gun, within 500 yards of the front line, which had been hit was kept in action although the breech had to be opened with a pickaxe before each round. Twelve guns (all six of one battery and three each in two others of the 276th Brigade) out of the forty-eight of the divisional artillery had been knocked out ; so close had the enemy come that two batteries and an anti-tank gun detachment had defended themselves with rifles. Throughout the day the machine-gun battalion had done fine service ; so much so that brigade and battalion commanders tended to become reconciled to the new system of the companies being under divisional control. With good reason could Major-General Jeudwine report to the XI. Corps that he had complete confidence his division would continue to maintain its position against five-fold numbers.

From about midday onwards an attack against the cyclists and cavalry in the front of the Portuguese Battle Zone developed. Fighting soon became severe, the supports and reserves being quickly absorbed into it. The 152nd Bde, whose 6th and 5/Seaforth Highlanders were moving forward through heavy shelling, could not be expected before 1.30 P.M. In fact, only two companies of the latter battalion managed to cross the Lawe and reinforce the left of King Edward's Horse, and eventually orders were given by Major-General Carter-Campbell (51st Divn) for the remaining two companies to hold the line of the Lawe and the bridgeheads which covered the passages. Patrols of the yeomanry found that Bout Deville village (in the 50th Divn area), on the left, was in enemy hands, but that there was a post of 50th Divn infantry in Le Marais South Post, a mile north-west of it. Germans were, in fact, streaming past the left of the XI. Corps mounted

troops, and were soon even behind them. On their right, Lacouture Post was surrounded and, after being heavily shelled since morning, was stormed by the enemy about 3 P.M. Nevertheless, the 11th Cyclists and 1/King Edward's Horse, and the two companies of the 5/Seaforth, when they arrived, held on. It was not until 5.30 P.M. that Lieut.-Colonel James issued orders for retirement, to be carried out half an hour later, to the defences of the Fosse bridge-head, a mile in rear, where, as at Vieille Chapelle to the south, he had placed a small garrison. The river, along which the 51st Divn was already established, was reached about 8 P.M. The tenacity and self-sacrifice of the 11th Cyclists and 1/King Edward's Horse, who lost half their numbers, had undoubtedly prevented the German success against the Portuguese from being developed into a complete break-through, and had given time for the brigades of the 51st and 50th Divns to be brought up to the Lawe.¹

Of these brigades, the 154th had already sent one battalion (4/Seaforth) to the 55th Division, and at 1.45 P.M. the other two (4/Gordon and 7/Argyll) were ordered forward to Les Caudrons, behind Locon, where they arrived at 4.15 P.M., to protect the left of the 55th Division. They were then instructed to man the Locon defences and establish a continuous line in the gap between the 55th Division and the 152nd Bde which had been sent to the help of the cyclists and yeomen. It was some hours before the battalions finally settled down; even then further reorganization was found necessary and took up part of the night.

At 2.15 P.M. the 153rd Bde, then on the march to Pacaut, was ordered to hold the salient of the Lawe, a mile across the base, just south of Lestrem, and north of the position of the 152nd Bde. It was not, however, until 5.20 P.M. that the leading battalion reached Pacaut, and an hour and a quarter later before it arrived at the southern end of the salient. There it was learnt from two officers of the 8/Durham L.I. (151st Bde of the 50th Divn) that the Marais Farm posts, east of the salient, and Rault Lock near its apex had been lost, but that there were no Germans west of the Lawe. The 7/Gordon and 6/Black Watch, therefore, took up a line across the salient short of the river, awaiting a counter-attack of the 8/Durham L.I.

¹ The casualties of the cyclists had been 9 officers and 230 other ranks, leaving only a lieutenant in command; for the K.E.H. the casualties are recorded as 9 officers and 138 other ranks for the period 9th to 12th April, but they were nearly all incurred on the 9th.

which had been arranged in order to regain the lock. This movement failed under fire from the enemy on the eastern bank. Meanwhile the XI. and XV. Corps had decided that the loop in the Lawe should be held by troops of the latter corps. The orders to the 6/Black Watch to this effect miscarried, but at 11 p.m. counter-orders came from corps headquarters that, in view of the difficult position of the XV. Corps, the 153rd Bde was to take over the salient and extend to Lestrem. The relief of the 8/Durham L.I. (151st Bde) proved difficult, and when daylight came it had not been carried out. The final situation at night was therefore that the salient, with the lock left unoccupied between the belligerents, was held by the 8/Durham L.I. with a battalion of the 153rd Bde on either side of it. The 51st Divn, with the 11th Cyclists and 1/King Edward's Horse attached, was in line from near Locon to about a mile south of Lestrem, holding bridgeheads on the eastern side of the Lawe at Vieille Chapelle and at Fosse.

In view of the length of the line for which the XI. Corps was now responsible, the severity of the fighting, and the loss of all but three of its twenty-four heavy guns (XLIX. and LXX Brigades) which were supporting the Portuguese,¹ Lieut.-General Haking requested the First Army to send him another infantry brigade and what heavy artillery it could. The 9th Bde of the 3rd Divn in the I. Corps area near Hersin (5 miles south of Béthune) was put at his disposal, began moving by bus at midnight, and was handed over to the 55th Division.² One battalion each was sent by Major-General Jeudwine to the 164th and 165th Brigades, and the third retained in reserve. Some brigades of heavy artillery (four batteries of 6-inch howitzers, four of 60-pdrs., one 9.2-inch gun, and one 12-inch howitzer) reached the XI. Corps on the 10th April from G.H.Q. reserve.

Turning to the 50th Divn, north of the 51st, in the XV. Corps area, the 6/Durham L.I. (151st Bde), very short of officers, had been unable to maintain its hold for long on the front line of the Portuguese Battle Zone south-west of

¹ The XLII. Brigade, to the south, also lost 4, although the gunners defended them to the last. The casualties of the XI. Corps Heavy Artillery amounted to 24 officers and 242 other ranks.

² The 3rd Divn (VI. Corps of the Third Army) had been relieved by the 2nd Canadian Division on the night of 29th/30th March, and moved to an area 7-10 miles south-west of Béthune, with headquarters at La-beuvrière, 4 miles west of Béthune, where it arrived on 1st and 2nd April.

Laventie. Before 1 P.M. the Germans had destroyed by shell fire the post (Cockshy House) on its left, nearest Laventie, together with its garrison, and had then attacked the rest in front. The other two battalions of the brigade (8th and 5/Durham L.I.) could not be spared to reinforce for fear of losing the river line; so the brigade trench-mortar company was sent up. But by the time it arrived another post (Le Drumez) north-west of Cockshy House had been lost, and the Germans were advancing rapidly in two columns, one northwards against the crossings over the Lys at Estaires, and the other westwards, past Bout Deville, against the crossings over the Lawe near Lestrem. The latter column, about 1.15 P.M., captured from the 8/Durham L.I. the Le Marais Farm Post West which, with East and South Posts, covered the big loop of the Lawe. Turned, therefore, on both flanks, and reduced to four officers and 60 men, the 6/Durham L.I. with the trench-mortar battery gradually fell back from the Battle Zone, and, by brigade orders, filled a gap between the 8th and 5/Durham L.I. at the junction of the Lawe with the Lys. The enemy captured from the 8/Durham L.I. the two remaining Le Marais Farm posts about 3 and 4.30 P.M. respectively, and at 5 P.M. appeared at the lock in the loop of the Lawe already mentioned. Under cover of a barrage, a few Germans managed to cross the river at this point; but they were unable to remain on the western bank, and the lock, as stated, was not occupied by either side.

The 5/Durham L.I. also had heavy fighting, the Germans trying to force a passage at the "Pont Levis"¹ in the eastern outskirts of Estaires; but the defenders of the bridgehead, aided by the brigade trench-mortar battery, managed to retain it. Towards 7 P.M., however, by which time it had become evident that the enemy had brought up field guns and was systematically destroying the garrisons of the bridgeheads south of the Lys, Major-General Jackson ordered the withdrawal of the whole of the 151st Bde to the western (northern) bank except such men of the 8/Durham L.I. as were still in the small bridgehead at Pont Riqueul, on the northern face of the loop of the Lawe. The main bridge at Estaires was blown up, but the attempted destruction of the Pont Levis, farther to the east, was a failure, owing to the leads being repeatedly cut by shell fire.

During the night the Germans made desperate efforts to cross at Pont Riqueul, bringing up field guns to closest

¹ The bridge is called by this name in the British accounts.

range, and considerable numbers of them succeeded in gaining a footing in the bridgehead. What remained of the garrison, being too weak to counter-attack, was therefore withdrawn to the western bank and the bridge destroyed.

As early as 11.25 A.M. the XV. Corps, on receiving a report that Fleurbaix had been lost—it turned out to be untrue—had ordered the 50th Divn to detail another brigade to assist the 151st Bde in holding the passages of the Lys from La Gorgue, above Estaires, as far as Sailly, below it, establishing posts across the river. The two leading battalions of the 150th Bde, which were sent, arrived, about 1.30 P.M., on the reach below Estaires, where they found survivors of the 119th and 120th Bdes of the 40th Divn. Almost at the same moment Germans appeared on the opposite bank, and were soon sweeping the northern bank with machine guns placed in the higher buildings near the bank. Their appearance caused Major-General Jackson to despatch two battalions of the 149th Bde to the help of the 150th. At 3.40 P.M. its third battalion was also sent, and reached Estaires about 5 P.M. Thus the 50th Divn now had its infantry in line from the loop of the Lawe to Sailly. The situation on the left towards Bac St. Maur, the next village below Sailly, in the 40th Divn area, was obscure. As heavy fire was coming from this quarter, a defensive flank was formed by the 6/Northumberland Fusiliers of the 149th Bde, whilst the divisional engineers continued the preparation of the bridges for demolition.

Firing across the Lys continued, and at 7 P.M. Br.-General H. C. Rees (150th Bde) ordered the 4/East Yorkshire and 4/Green Howards, which were holding his front, to push posts with Lewis guns down to the river to prevent the enemy from crossing it in the dark. Just at this time, the latter battalion reported that the Germans had already crossed at Bac St. Maur, and were moving northwards from that place. This information was sent to the division and drew the reply that the 74th Bde (25th Divn, in reserve of the IX. Corps) from Steenwerck (3 miles N.N.W. of Bac St. Maur) was making a counter-attack to recover the line of the river. In order to safeguard the flank of the 50th Divn, Br.-General E. P. A. Riddell (149th Bde) sent the 5/Northumberland Fusiliers to prolong the left of the 6th. At night, therefore, the 50th Divn held the northern bank of the river from the loop of the Lawe near the lock, where it was in touch with the 51st Divn, along the Lys to Sailly (which, being on the south bank, was in German hands),

with a left defensive flank turned back there. At Lestrem a small bridgehead was held covering the drawbridge; at Estaires the Pont Levis was still passable for infantry, but not for wheeled traffic; at Saily the bridge was intact, though many attempts had been made to blow it up. There, as elsewhere, the firing leads were cut by shells or bullets and replaced several times. The enemy's attempts to cross at Saily were, however, foiled by two companies of the 2/R. Scots Fusiliers (120th Bde), under Lieut.-Colonel J. E. Utterson-Kelso.¹ The other bridges had been more or less destroyed, and when this work had been completed, the engineers fought as infantry.² In view of a possible relief of the 151st Bde by the 51st Divn (for the 50th Divn, which had only two engineer field companies and the pioneer battalion in reserve, had suffered heavily), also by reason of the 40th Divn later taking over the defensive flank, some changes of position were carried out during the night. At dawn the brigades stood from right to left, 151st, 149th and 150th.

We left the 40th Divn with only one battalion (13/Green Howards, 121st Bde) still in the old front line, with a defensive flank formed. What remained, less than half, of the 20/Middlesex was making for Saily; the 12/Suffolk, the third battalion of the 121st Bde, originally in support, was holding Fleurbaix against all attacks. The 119th Bde, on the right of the 121st next the Portuguese, had been hustled back north-westwards. The 120th Bde, in reserve, had not been able to reach the Portuguese Battle Zone, as arranged, and had formed a line behind Laventie, facing south, where it was soon in action.

Shortly after midday, although elsewhere repulsed in their attempt to press northwards, the Germans managed to reach Red House Post, between the 12/Suffolk and 13/Green Howards, and now seemed to be advancing westwards rather than northwards. The remnants of the 119th Bde were, however, soon hard pressed, and forced back on Bac St. Maur, where the permanent bridge had been blown up at 2.15 P.M., and two out of the three temporary bridges subsequently destroyed under fire. Reinforced by

¹ This unit, from the 30th Divn (Fifth Army), had only joined the 120th Bde at Saily on the previous day, to take the place of a disbanded battalion.

² Between Estaires and Fort Rompu there were 4 permanent and 21 temporary bridges.

the divisional engineers and pioneers, headquarters under Br.-General Crozier, and brigade schools, the 119th, by 3.30 P.M., was holding a 4,000 yards' line on the north bank of the Lys, from just north of Sailly, through Bac St. Maur, to Fort Rompu (3 miles above Armentières). Half an hour later the rear guard evacuated Sailly and crossed the river, where the bridge was still defended by the 2/R. Scots Fusiliers (120th Bde). Fighting a rear-guard action, the 120th Bde, reduced to a strength of four hundred rifles, also fell back towards the Lys, above Sailly, and crossed the river there about 4 P.M., so that by that hour the greater part of the 40th Divn was established on either side of Sailly.

The position of the 119th Bde at Bac St. Maur was badly exposed. On the southern bank there were several rows of houses, commanding the northern bank, from which the enemy (*10th Ersatz Division*) was able to employ tiers of fire; in addition to machine guns he brought up field guns, which fired towards the northern bank at a range of under a thousand yards, so that the defenders were driven to shelter a couple of hundred yards from the river and lost direct observation over it. This enabled part of the *370th Regiment*, under covering fire of guns and machine guns, to cross by the undestroyed temporary bridge about 4 P.M.

The importance of the Bac St. Maur crossing and the difficulty of defending it had not escaped the notice of the XV. Corps; measures to secure it from the south had therefore been taken, although, as it proved, too late. As early as 10.15 A.M. Lieut.-General Du Cane had ordered the 34th Divn (Major-General C. L. Nicholson), in the Armentières sector north of the 40th, to send his 101st Bde (Br.-General R. C. Gore), which was in corps reserve, less one battalion, to a position about five hundred yards south of Bac St. Maur. Here it would come under command of the 40th Divn. The order reached the brigade at 11.20 A.M., and ten minutes afterwards the two battalions were on the move. By 11 A.M., however, the advance of a body of the enemy past the eastern side of Fleurbaix, though kept in check by artillery and machine-gun fire, seemed to offer a very serious threat to the right flank of the 34th Divn, and Lieut.-General Du Cane, who was visiting divisional headquarters, restored the 101st Bde to Major-General Nicholson's command, in order that he might hold a line between Bac St. Maur and the 103rd Bde, which was in the line south-east of Armentières, next to the sector of the 40th Divn. The orders for its recall did not reach Br.-General Gore until

12.52 P.M., and when they were passed on to the battalions, the second, the 11/Suffolk, duly took position on the right of the 103rd Bde; but before the two companies of the 16/Royal Scots, which were leading, received the message, the enemy had been discovered to be in possession of the ground five hundred yards south of Bac St. Maur which the companies were to hold, and they were gradually forced back. Later, by order of Br.-General Crozier (119th Bde), the 16/R. Scots established itself eastwards of Bac St. Maur from Fort Rompu towards Fleurbaix. It had suffered so heavily in the course of the afternoon that it had to be reinforced by two companies of the 15/R. Scots (101st Bde). As the other two companies of this latter battalion had been sent to the 102nd Bde on the 8th to replace casualties suffered by that formation in the gas bombardment of Armentières, the 101st Bde reserve was now reduced to 115 details who had returned from working with the engineers, with three machine guns.

Towards 4.30 P.M. the 12/Suffolk, after its long and most valuable defence of Fleurbaix, was compelled to evacuate that place. Falling back northwards, it filled the gap in the defensive line between the Royal Scots and the 11/Suffolk. All attempts to break this line failed, although some of the enemy who managed to cross at Bac St. Maur were able to fire into the backs of the defenders of Fort Rompu.

When the Germans forced a passage at Bac St. Maur, the survivors of the 119th Bde had fallen back to Croix du Bac, a mile to the north-west, but the 120th on its right, mixed with the 150th Bde, had remained holding the line of the Lys between Estaires and Sailly. About 5 P.M. orders came from the 40th Divn (headquarters now at Doulieu, 4 miles west of Bac St. Maur) for the relief of its two brigades, and their concentration near le Petit Mortier (2 miles north-west of Bac St. Maur); the 120th was to be replaced by the 150th, already in position, and the 119th by the 74th of the 25th Division, now coming up. Both brigades were withdrawn by 6 P.M., each being formed into a composite battalion; the 120th, however, was short of half of the 2/R. Scots Fusiliers, who were still defending the northern end of the bridge at Sailly.

General Horne had no reserves available to replace those of the XV. Corps, which Lieut.-General Du Cane had been compelled to use early in the day in order to try and fill the gap left by the withdrawal of the Portuguese. North of his

34th Divn in Armentières the line was continued by the 25th Divn (Major-General Sir E. G. T. Bainbridge) of the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. H. Gordon), the latter corps being the right of the Second Army. In response to an appeal for help from Lieut.-General Du Cane, at 12.30 P.M., Lieut.-General Gordon ordered the 74th Bde (Br.-General H. M. Craigie Halkett), in reserve of the 25th Divn at Neuve Eglise (5 miles north-west of Armentières), to be placed at the disposal of the XV. Corps. Lieut.-General Du Cane handed it over to the 34th Divn, and at 3.20 P.M. directed that the brigade should advance from Steenwerck on Bac St. Maur, and drive back the Germans in the event of their having crossed the Lys; if they had not done so it was to occupy the northern bank.

From Steenwerck the 74th Bde advanced about 5 P.M. in three columns on a broad front, but it was not until it had gone half-way towards Croix du Bac at 6 P.M. that Br.-General Craigie Halkett learnt from Br.-General Crozier, who was re-assembling the fragments of the 119th Bde, that this village was strongly occupied by the Germans. Arrangements for attack were then made, and the troops got under way about 7 P.M. The centre battalion (11/Lancashire Fusiliers), sent directly against Croix du Bac, was stopped by fire, and its second attack, at 8.30 P.M., assisted by the 9/L.N. Lancashire on the right, gained but little ground; but in a third attempt at 2 A.M. the village was captured and a line established south and east of it. The 9/L.N. Lancashire then pushed forward to the Lys above Bac St. Maur, the third battalion of the brigade, the 3/Worcestershire, having already reached the river below that place. Enemy parties which had escaped notice and had been left behind during the night advance on Bac St. Maur, now began to give trouble, and the line of the 74th Bde was, about 6 A.M. on the 10th, adjusted to run from north of Sailly (where it connected with the 150th Bde), south of Croix du Bac, to the right of the 101st Bde near Fort Rompu.

Sketch
16.

Thus, after fighting at close range throughout the day and after a troubled night, the XI. and XV. Corps, by exhausting all their reserves, had succeeded in forming a thin line round the great pocket, ten miles wide and five and a half miles deep, which the Germans had made in their front. This new line, except for small bridgeheads at Vieille Chapelle and Fosse, and an enemy footing at Bac St. Maur, ran behind the Lawe and the Lys, with flanks connecting it to an unaltered front line on either side.

The XV. Corps heavy artillery had not suffered so badly as that of the XI., for most of its guns had been on the northern side of the Lys ; even so it had lost 14 out of 78, mostly in the Fleurbaix area. Twenty-five field guns also were lost. Not only had the general casualties been very heavy, but the situation was very serious ; for night fell on the Lawe and Lys with Armentières and the small towns like Estaires and Merville on fire, guns coming out of action, always a depressing sight, the inhabitants fleeing, infantrymen wandering about seeking their units, and but few reserves coming up.

There was little air activity on the 9th, owing to the poor visibility. After the fog lifted, clouds came down to a thousand feet ; moreover, many squadrons of the R.A.F. were forced to pack up and move on account of the German advance. About fifty machines carried out low-flying attacks against ground targets on the roads near Festubert, Estaires and Bac St. Maur. Contact patrols reported that the German advance was slowing down, with indications that the enemy intended to exploit his success in a northerly direction across the Lys.

As a result of the experiences of the Fifth and Third Armies in March, the casualty clearing stations of the First Army had been moved back, and by the 9th April were arranged in three areas, respectively seven to eight miles (six clearing stations), 11 to 12 miles (seven), and 15 to 18 miles (four), behind the front, and the six in the forward area were withdrawn during the 9th. By means of motor ambulances and lorries all the wounded who were brought back to the main dressing stations were evacuated in time.

News of the battle had dribbled back to G.H.Q. slowly during the 9th, since, owing to the fog, it had been difficult for corps and divisions to ascertain what had happened. Almost up to midday little was known at Montreuil except that there was a heavy fog, rendering aeroplane reconnaissance impossible, while no sound of machine guns firing could be heard. Before 12.45 P.M., when a conference took place at the Commander-in-Chief's chateau between Sir Douglas Haig and General Foch, it was known for certain by their passage through British troops that the Portuguese had retired, taking their artillery with them. Sir Douglas Haig pointed out to General Foch that this second offensive showed the enemy was evidently aiming at the destruction of the British Army. To prevent this, the British front

should be reduced without delay to enable a British reserve to be collected in order to maintain the battle, and cover the Channel ports and the Bruay coal mines: besides the shortening of the front would present the enemy with a smaller objective and lessen the serious wastage of British units. He suggested also that, in addition to a reduction of front south of the Somme, already repeatedly requested, the frontage of six British divisions should be taken over by the French in the Ypres sector; or, failing this, that four French divisions should be placed in the area Doullens—Frévent, that is behind Arras. General Foch declined to take over any part of the British front, and would yield no further than to offer to hold four of the divisions which he proposed to assemble behind Amiens, south of the Somme, ready to move north-westwards if and when required. The drawbacks of placing French troops in this area—where they would block the communications of the British Fourth Army and congest the railheads of the British divisions refitting in the neighbourhood—and the delays which must ensue in their coming to the assistance of the British in the north were duly pointed out to General Foch. He nevertheless adhered to his decision, stating that his intention was to maintain the French reserves intact so as to be ready to meet emergencies. On the possible outcome of the day's attack he offered no opinion. From conversation, it appeared that he expected the British to hold their own as the old Army had done at Ypres in 1914; further, believing that Paris was the German objective, he considered that the attack near Armentières was only a diversion to draw reserves from the French front south of the Somme, where there were still 24 German divisions opposite the French First Army alone. No doubt to encourage the French in this belief, the Germans attacked Hangard and Sénecat Wood during the 9th, and continued their attacks near St. Gobain.¹ Of the promised French offensive there were no signs.

Finally, at 8.30 P.M., General Foch sent a written Note to G.H.Q. requesting that the zone south of the Somme to be allotted to the French might be tripled in area by extensions westwards to Blangy (15 miles south-west of Abbeville), a measure which would further inconvenience the Fourth Army, and almost cut the zone of the British Armies in half. He also asked that arrangements might be made for the ultimate move northwards of four French

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 462.

divisions from the area within seven miles of Amiens (with Picquigny on the Somme as its western boundary), to the line Acheux (7 miles north-west of Albert)—Doullens, about half-way to Arras. The stationing of a large number of French troops along the Somme from Amiens to beyond Abbeville made it appear as if General Foch had given up as lost the British troops covering the Channel ports north of the river, and was preparing a new front behind them which should guard Paris.

Sir Douglas Haig thus thrown on his own resources was forced to appeal to the Second Army; for he could not yet weaken the Fourth (Fifth) and Third Armies on the Somme. General Plumer agreed to spare the 29th and 49th Divisions, neither of which had been engaged in the Somme battles, from the VIII. and XXII. Corps in front of and north-west of Ypres. At 4.55 P.M. Lieut.-General Du Cane was informed that two infantry brigades of the 29th Division would arrive by bus in the Steenwerck area that night, the third following on the 10th. Later he was told that one brigade of the 49th Division, with one machine-gun company and a field company R.E., would arrive at La Crèche (1½ miles north of Steenwerck) during the night, and that the remainder of the division would follow as soon as it was relieved. At 10.25 P.M. the Second Army telegraphed that one battalion, in reserve of the 19th Division, then at Wulverghem (5 miles north of Armentières) would be moved to Nieppe, two miles nearer, where it would come under the 34th Divn, with a view to taking over a portion of its front during the night. The Second Army was thus denuded of its reserves, but arrangements had been made by General Plumer for a retirement which would shorten its line, and enable new reserves to be combed out.

The disasters of the day must be attributed to the failure to relieve the Portuguese 2nd Division, which, though weak, was holding a longish line after a miserable winter in a water-logged area. Placed amid strangers who neither spoke nor even understood their language, with no special interest in the War, which their Government had entered for political purposes, and warned that the Battle Zone behind them would be held by British troops, the retirement of the Portuguese after bombardment in heavy fog is not altogether incomprehensible. There had been every desire on the part of G.H.Q. to relieve them, but this could only be done in three ways: first, by using tired divisions from the

Somme, which could hardly arrive in time;¹ secondly, by taking divisions from the Second Army, already drained dry, so that further subtraction from it meant giving up part of the Ypres salient, a step against which General Foch had already raised verbal objections, confirmed in writing on the 10th April;² thirdly, by bringing north British divisions released by the French taking over more of the battle front south of the Somme, which General Foch declined to sanction.

The commanders of the XI. and XV. Corps were as fully prepared as their means allowed to meet the emergency of the Portuguese retirement, and with their small reserves they actually filled the gap in good time; but, although they used up all their resources, their troops were too weak in numbers to maintain an effective line. Foch's confidence that the British would hang on somehow or other was no doubt justified, yet they could not do so indefinitely. General Joffre in 1916 had similarly trusted to the French preventing the Germans from breaking through at Verdun; he, however, with nice judgment and timing had launched the Somme offensive, which instantly caused the Germans to desist. General Foch made no such stroke, though he had plenty of divisions in the line of the Sixth and Third Armies actually standing ready. It may be argued, however, that the time had not yet come for counter-offensives and that it was wiser to wait until British reinforcements had arrived and the American Army was in the line.

The 55th Division's complete victory over the attackers has often been attributed to the good construction of the strongpoints in the Givenchy area; but it was really due to the temper and training of the men behind the guns and rifles, used to the best advantage, as is always the case in such successes. The units had not only been so trained that the men could all use their weapons with effect, and had complete confidence in their shooting and in themselves, but each man and each platoon knew the task that he or it had to perform: that a certain line, the "Line of Resistance", had to be maintained at all costs, and that if the enemy entered a certain trench, a party detailed for the purpose had to turn him out. A sound system was prescribed by an

¹ Lieut.-General Haking actually ordered the relief by the 51st Divn to take place on the night of the 7th/8th: but on the earnest entreaty of the commander of that division, which had not had time even to test its new machine guns and other equipment, he postponed it for forty-eight hours.

² See Chapter XI.

experienced divisional commander serving under an experienced corps commander, and no time was lost in applying it. Every night something was done to perfect the defences; more wire was put up to herd the enemy, if he entered, towards machine-gun fire and stop the lateral exploitation of any local success. The 55th Division had taken over the sector on the 15th February, and thus had seven weeks to make preparations in an area which had been in British hands since October 1914, and was already well developed. It certainly enjoyed great advantages over divisions like those of the Fifth Army, which had been thrown into wide sectors devoid of any adequate system of defence, and given only a few weeks for reorganization, training and preparation; others, like the 34th, 40th, 50th and 51st, had been rushed to their positions in a state of exhaustion, without their artillery, from a ten days' battle in which they had lost seventy or eighty per cent of their infantry. That such risks had to be taken was the responsibility not the fault of the higher command of the British troops. Once the fighting began, it became a company commanders' and soldiers' battle. The successful resistance exhibited by the 55th Division and by the 11th Cyclists and 1st King Edward's Horse showed that the whole front might well have been maintained. The 51st and 50th Divns, too, accomplished almost a miracle in holding back victorious troops after being launched "into the blue" to stop their advance in the Portuguese area.

On this occasion fog probably assisted the defence; for, in face of the difficult ground of the Lys plain, the German infantry could not advance as fast as had been calculated, so that the creeping barrage very soon ran away from them. On the other hand, fog delayed the British reinforcements in reaching their positions and masked the machine guns.

From one peril, unknown at the time, the Allies were fortunately saved. The Germans brought up a number of tanks; but the ground was found to be too soft for the new heavy German tanks, while of the ten captured English machines which had been sent to "the right sector of the *II. Bavarian Corps*", one stuck and, lying across a road, upset an approach march. Of the others, "information fails".¹

That evening Major-General Sir G. M. W. Macdonogh, the Director of Military Intelligence, War Office, who was at G.H.Q., wrote a memorandum for the Chief of the Imperial

¹ Rupprecht ii., p. 375.

General Staff in which he said he considered that the main German objective was the destruction of the British Army; "with that object he is concentrating against it every division he can make available from every front. He is showing no signs of making a decisive attack against the French and those attacks that he has made have had the object either, as at Moreuil, of bringing the St. Just—Breteuil railway under fire and thus of interfering with the French concentration, or, as at Chauny, of holding French reserves. He is digging in on the Montdidier—Noyon line evidently with the intention of forming a defensive flank for his operations further to the north." He then went on to stress the necessity of establishing a strong reserve for the British Army and finished by saying:

- "1. Germany is endeavouring to destroy the British Army and decide the War by concentrating all her available reserves against the British front;
- "2. the British Army now in France cannot withstand this attack unless an adequate reserve is formed immediately;
- "3. in order to form this reserve, all British troops should be withdrawn at once from Italy and Macedonia, the operations of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force must become purely defensive, and the British divisions now in Mesopotamia should be transferred to France;
- "4. the French Army must co-operate to the fullest possible extent with the British, and in order to do so must increase its reserves in a manner similar to that suggested in 3;
- "5. the Americans must aid in every way in their power;
- "6. the alternative to the action suggested in 3, 4 and 5 is a decisive defeat".

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 9TH APRIL

Map 15.
Sketch
14.

Stated shortly, the German plan was for the *Sixth Army* (General von Quast), from the front Givenchy—Fromelles, to push forward in a north-westerly direction on Hazebrouck; the *Fourth Army* (General Sixt von Armin), with its left on Frélinghien, was to join in on the next day and advance due westwards. It was expected that the position between Fromelles and Frélinghien, covering Armentières, would then be pinched out, so only one division was spread out in front of it.¹ The success of the whole operation depended on reaching the Lys between Estaires and Armentières in

¹ For the distribution of the German corps and divisions, see Map 15 and Sketch 17.

from twenty-four to forty-eight hours, and crossing it at numerous places before the British could bring up reinforcements and organize resistance ; if they should succeed in doing this, the German attack would be ruined in its first stage.¹ The *LV.* and *XIX. Corps*, each with two divisions in front line, were to make the main and decisive attack against the Portuguese 2nd Division, protected on the left towards the La Bassée canal by the *IV. Corps*, which advanced against the 55th Division, with three divisions in front line. On the right of the main attack, the *II. Bavarian Corps* was given the task of widening the breach northwards in the direction of Armentières, and reaching the Lys east of Sailly ; for this purpose four divisions (two from the *XIX. Corps*) were detailed : the *32nd Division*, which attacked the 119th Bde (40th Divn), was placed close to Fromelles ready to attack, with the *10th Ersatz Division (XIX. Corps)*, at first in second line, behind it ; the *42nd Division* (right of the *XIX. Corps*), as soon as the Portuguese front had been broken, was to turn northwards ; and the *11th Reserve Division* was to follow it. Every possible provision was made for the passage of the water obstacles.

Following close behind the barrage, the attacking divisions overran the forward positions of the Portuguese, "only deeper in the "battlefield did machine-gun nests compel a few halts".² Nine field guns were captured. Then the barrage came to an end, and, in spite of the efforts of the engineers, who suffered considerable losses from British gun-fire, to make tracks and bridges, it was impossible to get the guns forward over the muddy and bottomless cratered area. Even the batteries detailed to accompany the infantry stuck, and only towards evening were a few of them brought up.

"British troops [the cyclists and cavalry] had come to the aid of "the Portuguese. Enemy machine guns between the farms south "of Bout Deville stopped the attack on the flat ground made by "the *1st Bavarian Reserve Regiment (1st Bavarian Reserve Division "of the LV. Corps)*, and *III./3rd Bavarian Reserve Regiment* from the "second line, and brought bloody losses. . . . The *2nd Bavarian "Reserve Regiment* had to overpower separately each machine gun "on the north edge of Lacouture and in the farms north of the village ; "then it inclined to the left, and in the evening reached Vieille "Chapelle and the Lawe south of that village. Not until the light "trench mortars of the three Bavarian regiments and the batteries "of *I./1st Bavarian Reserve Field Artillery Regiment* reached the "front towards evening and put the machine guns in the church "towers of Lacouture and Vieille Chapelle out of action [there were "no machine guns there, but the church towers were shelled] were "the desperately struggling Bavarian infantry able to clear resist- "ance away. [They did not take Vieille Chapelle.] "At 5 p.m. it was decided that Pont Riquel could not be taken by daylight ; but, with the help of a field gun, it was captured during the night.

On the right, the *35th* and *42nd Divisions (XIX. Corps)* reached the Lys from Estaires to Sailly. The *10th Ersatz Division* came up on their right and was the only division to force the passage of the Lys, at Bac St. Maur. In spite of shortage of ammunition, it is claimed that the division maintained itself in Croix du Bac [not the case] in a struggle which lasted practically all night. In this fighting,

¹ M.W.B., 11th May 1928.

² B.O.A., p. 482.

the *11th Reserve Division*, which had followed the *10th Ersatz*, took part.

On the extreme right, the *32nd Division*, moving against the 119th Bde, fought its way past Bois Grenier and Fleurbaix towards Armentières.

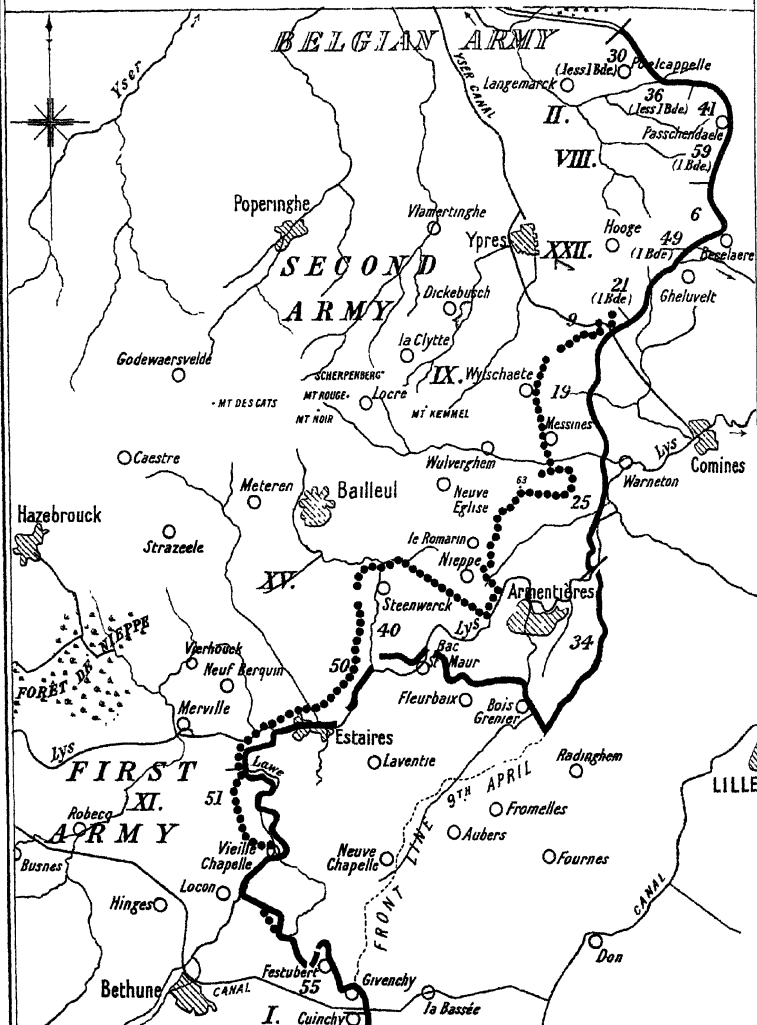
Of the failure against the 55th Division, it is said that "the enemy resistance could not be broken";¹ "in Givenchy, the 55th Division, a particularly good Scottish [*sic*] division, offered obstinate resistance".² The captured orders of the *4th Ersatz Division* show that the reduction of the Givenchy salient was to have been carried out by two forces, each of a regiment of three battalions, strengthened by storm troops and heavy machine guns. The salient was not to be attacked directly, but outflanked and isolated; there was to be no frontal attack across the craters, but machine guns mounted at commanding points were to engage the defenders whilst the enveloping attacks were in progress. The southern force was to penetrate to the "Pont Fixe" (over the canal, about 2,000 yards behind the front line); the northern force to Plantin and the south end of Windy Corner. When these objectives had been gained, the two forces were to join hands and participate in the general advance towards Gorre and Béthune.

The reports which came in towards evening to Crown Prince Rupprecht sounded so favourable that the *Sixth Army* was ordered to push as far as possible over the Lys during the night. Recognizing there was great difficulty in moving the guns, he ordered that at least the infantry and part of the field artillery should try to reach the high ground beyond the Lys. The later reports showed that the success was less than first thought: "Only at Bac St. Maur and Estaires had we succeeded in crossing the Lys, and at Petit Marais [Marais Farm] and south of Vieille Chapelle, the Lawe [only at Bac St. Maur did the Germans succeed in crossing]. The difficulty lies in getting the guns forward."

¹ B.O.A.

² Rupprecht ii., p. 375.

THE LYS, 10TH APRIL.



Line 10th April..... 11th April a.m.....
Army boundaries..... Corps boundaries.....

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

CHAPTER XI

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

10TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLE OF ESTAIRES (*continued*) AND THE BATTLE OF MESSINES ¹

(Map 16 ; Sketch 18)

THE rain which had fallen lightly during the night of the 9th/10th April ceased before dawn, but a ground mist lay over the waterlogged plain of the Lys in the early morning and formed again after 2 P.M. Throughout the day the clouds hung low, rendering air observation impossible except from altitudes of a few hundred feet. Map 16.
Sketch
18.

The enemy continued the attack with his *Sixth Army*, south of Armentières, with Hazebrouck as its objective. His main effort was directed against the XI. and XV. Corps of the First Army (General Sir H. Horne) whose frontage had been extended from 16 to 29 miles by the events of the 9th April. In addition he began a fresh advance westwards, north of Armentières, with his *Fourth Army* against the IX. Corps of the Second Army (General Sir H. Plumer), on the front from Warneton on the Lys to the Ypres—Comines canal, that is against the high ground marked by the Messines—Wytschaete ridge and the southern part of the main Ypres ridge. The fighting was severe, and the British troops were very weak in numbers, with few reserves available even for local counter-attacks ; yet by dint of “puttying-up” the line with small detachments, as had been done at “First Ypres”, the Germans were prevented from making any great progress, although they succeeded in enlarging the Bac St. Maur bridgehead, captured other

¹ The Battle of Estaires for the XI. and XV. Corps of the First Army, and the Battle of Messines 1918 for the IX. Corps of the Second Army.

passages of the Lawe and the Lys, and obtained a footing on Messines Ridge. This success in combination with that of the previous day caused orders to be given for the evacuation of Armentières, as the town stood in danger of being cut off by the inroads made on either side of the salient in which it lay. The line, however, remained unbroken, and touch between the First and Second Armies was maintained.

Against the 55th Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine) of the XI. Corps no progress whatever was made, in spite of a heavy bombardment which fell from 6 A.M. until midday. At intervals, from 7.30 A.M. to 9.30 A.M. and then from 1 P.M. to 5.15 P.M. and again at 7 P.M., the Germans made fierce attacks under special barrages designed to overwhelm the 165th and 166th Brigades, the former now supported by the 9th Bde (3rd Divn), holding the centre and left of the divisional front between Festubert and the Lawe. Here captured Portuguese field guns were brought into action by the enemy at close range. Met by fire of all kinds and counter-attacked with equal fierceness by the Lancashire men, who after their success of the previous day were in the highest spirits, the Germans lost severely, and at the end of the day the line of the 55th Division was still unbroken. To use the words of the German report, there had been "no appreciable advance". In fact, only a couple of hundred yards had been gained in the salient near Le Touret, where a company of the 1/5th King's Own had lost a hundred out of a hundred and forty men.

In the 51st Divn sector (Major-General G. T. C. Carter Campbell), along the Lawe, small parties of the enemy crossed the river before daylight by a footbridge at the boundary of the 154th and 152nd Bdes, and occupied two cottages, only one of which was recaptured.¹ In the mist the enemy had brought up field guns and machine guns almost to the bank of the river, which fired specially on machine-gun posts until evening. In spite of this, thanks to plenty of ammunition having come up, the machine-gun companies broke up all the enemy's other attempts to cross the Lawe south of the loop which it makes near Lestrem, whilst field artillery barrages were fired at intervals on areas over which the enemy might advance to the attack. The small bridge-heads on the eastern bank at Vieille Chapelle and Fosse, held by parties of the 1st King Edward's Horse, the 5/Sea-

¹ See the German account at end of Chapter.

forth and a company of the 6/Gordon Highlanders, under Captain J. R. Christie, also drove off all attacks until late in the evening when Fosse was captured. But at 8.30 A.M., the enemy under cover of a machine-gun barrage, forced a crossing at Pont Riqueul, at the northern end of the loop, where the bridge had not been completely destroyed; and, after varying fortunes, towards 7 P.M. the 153rd Bde (with which the 8/Durham L.I. of the 151st Bde remained all day) occupied a line across the base of the salient, still maintaining touch with the 50th Divn on the left. It might have been better to have taken up this line earlier and entrenched—even though breastworks were necessary—and so have turned the loop of the Lawe into a trap for the enemy, with the river behind him. But this was not recognized at the moment; the frequent changes of command at the loop had prevented any continuous tactical policy being adopted. Nothing could show more plainly how difficult it is to bring out in history the fact that the actual situation can never present itself so clearly to the commanders on the spot and at the time as it does to the subsequent reader of the printed record.

During the day, the four German divisions (*1st Bavarian Reserve, 8th Bavarian Reserve, 16th and 8th*) opposite the 51st Divn had made persistent efforts to bring their artillery forward across the waterlogged ground of the old area of the Portuguese 2nd Division into a position where it could cover the passage of the Lawe. Eventually, towards 6 P.M. the attempt succeeded, whereupon they opened a bombardment of the river line, continuing it for two hours. Their infantry started to advance about 7 P.M., and soon the Fosse bridgehead was lost, the defenders retiring after blowing up the bridge; but Vieille Chapelle continued to hold out. Further north, advancing from the salient of the Lawe, the Germans forced back part of the line near Lestrem, and gained the southern part of the village; through the gaps thus formed they moved southwards almost down to Vieille Chapelle, clearing away the defenders as they went. Towards midnight, however, a new defensive line was formed about a mile back from the river, extending from Vieille Chapelle round to Lestrem. The enemy having secured a definite bridgehead on the western bank of the Lawe, his pressure against the XI. Corps somewhat slackened, though it stiffened at night, increasing again in intensity at 5 A.M. on the 11th. The further course of events is related in the following chapter.

During the morning of the 10th, the First Army instructed the I. Corps to be prepared to assist the XI., north of it, if the 55th Division should be driven to swing back to the line of the La Bassée canal. The 61st Divn, which since the 3rd April had been resting and refitting around Pissy (10 miles west of Amiens) in reserve of the Fourth Army, was (less artillery) placed at the disposal of the XI. Corps. It was ordered to move and, detraining near Aire, marched to the line Robecq—Merville, which it reached on the 11th.¹ The 31st Divn (less artillery), from G.H.Q. reserve, took its place in First Army reserve.

The situation of the XV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir J. Du Cane) on the morning of the 10th April was unhappy. During the 9th, the trend of events had caused three miles of its front facing east next to the Portuguese to be changed into a defensive flank eleven miles long facing south; and in the centre of this flank the Germans had effected a passage across the Lys at Bac St. Maur. Armentières was now in a salient, for the evacuation of which the First Army issued orders by telephone early in the morning, confirming them by telegram at 10.50 A.M. The troops were to withdraw northwards across the Lys—the town is on the southern side—and the railway bridge over the river was to be destroyed.² Orders, however, were also issued by Lieut.-General Du Cane at 8 A.M. for a combined counter-attack to be made to recover the Bac St. Maur bridgehead by the 119th and 120th Bdes (40th Divn) from the Steenwerck Switch (to which these brigades, each reorganized as a battalion about three hundred strong, had been sent during the night),³ and the 74th Bde, which had already vainly counter-attacked for this purpose on the evening of the 9th. The 50th Divn (Major-General H. C. Jackson) was to hold its position. It was still without its artillery, but was supported by that of the 34th, under Br.-General E. C. W. D. Walthall. Besides his own two brigades, this officer had two Army brigades and a heavy battery under his command, and was at times called on to help other divisions.

It was becoming obvious that the enemy would renew his efforts to force a passage at Estaires; for although

¹ Some of its reinforcements joined it at the entraining stations.

² Appendix 6.

³ The third brigade, the 121st, was with the right wing of the 34th Divn, south of Armentières.

nearly all the buildings of the little town were on the left bank, the Pont Levis, though partly destroyed, was still passable. By a misunderstanding between the battalions of the 149th and 150th Bdes, the bridge had been left unguarded during the night, but just before dawn a small post had been stationed at it. Attempts made by Br.-General E. P. A. Riddell (149th Bde, 50th Divn) to reinforce the defenders of the passage failed under machine-gun fire, and in the mist, about 7.30 A.M., parties of the *35th Division* managed to cross. A counter-attack, supported by all the guns available—12 field guns and four howitzers—made by the 6/Northumberland Fusiliers at 8.40 A.M. got within a couple of hundred yards of the bridge, but was then brought to a standstill. With the support of trench-mortar fire, the Germans soon spread north-eastwards and westwards. Two desperate attempts made by the 149th Bde to retake the town led to some street fighting in which two-thirds of it were recovered, the young soldiers just out from home fighting magnificently in the mêlée. Nevertheless by 11 A.M. the enemy had established himself in a small bridgehead. A pause ensued until 4 P.M. whilst the enemy brought up artillery and reinforcements; then, after a bombardment, he cleared Estaires of the 149th Bde, which fell back to a previously prepared line, old grass-grown trenches, in fair repair with some wire in front, with a good field of fire, about twelve hundred yards from the river.¹ As the defenders withdrew, the Germans crossed the Lys in force at the Pont Levis, and improvised bridges near it; but their attack against the new line at 6 P.M. was repulsed by fire.

The 151st Bde, on the right of the 149th, extending past La Gorgue southward to the junction with the 51st Divn, was not attacked, but it swung back its left in order to keep touch. Content with securing a bridgehead, the Germans made no further attempt to progress at Estaires.

The Saily sector, held by the 150th Bde, with two companies of the 2/R. Scots Fusiliers still defending the northern exit of the partly destroyed bridge, was left in comparative peace until 11 A.M., when parties of the enemy, from Estaires on the west and Bac St. Maur on the east, began to threaten its flanks, whilst it was also attacked in front. Help was expected from the 29th Division, whose commander, Major-General D. E. Cayley, in order to learn the state of affairs, visited 150th Bde headquarters during

¹ The Support Line marked on Map 16.

the morning, and informed them that the 86th and 87th Brigades had arrived at Vieux and Neuf Berquin respectively, some five miles to the north-west, between 6 and 8 A.M. Br.-General H. C. Rees therefore instructed his battalions to hold on. Soon afterwards the 29th Division sent up the 1/Border Regiment (87th Brigade), which, with a corps reinforcement battalion, was allotted to the 149th Bde, but at 1 P.M. it passed on to the support line of the 150th Bde, the 2/Royal Fusiliers (86th Brigade) being sent to the 151st Bde. Soon after midday, however, the left, and later the right, of the 150th Bde was forced back, the 2/R. Scots Fusiliers still maintaining the defence of the passage of the Sailly bridge. Thanks to a liberal supply of ammunition, brought up in the limbers of a machine-gun company, a good defence was maintained until about 4 P.M., when superior numbers and artillery fire had their effect, and the battalions of the 150th Bde retired on the support line, some thousand yards from the river; there they regained touch with the formations on either flank.

The situation as viewed from XV. Corps headquarters remained exceedingly obscure throughout the morning: there was little gun-fire and the defence seemed to be holding its own. It was not until 2.55 P.M. that Lieut.-General Du Cane judged it necessary—after his chief of the General Staff had spoken by telephone to the G.S.O.1—to order the 29th Division, which had already sent up two battalions to the 50th Divn, to advance towards Sailly with a view to discovering how the situation really stood. The 29th Division was to drive the enemy back if he were met, and to fill any gap in the front, and the G.S.O.2 of the corps was sent to make sure that these instructions were understood. Accordingly Major-General Cayley ordered up the 87th (Br.-General G. H. N. Jackson) with the 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape), in support behind its left flank,¹ and the advance took place at 5 P.M., after detachments had been called in. At 7.47 P.M. Br.-General Jackson reported that the 150th Bde, as already stated, was holding the line a thousand yards from the Lys—how weakly he did not say—with its right on Trou Bayard, due north of Estaires, and its left about fifteen hundred yards west of Pont de la Boudrette, which is due north of the eastern end of Sailly: that he had heard that the 40th Divn had been forced back on Le Petit Mortier (that is a thousand yards

¹ The artillery of the 29th Division had not accompanied it; it still remained in action in the Ypres Salient.

behind the centre of the Steenwerck Switch): that the enemy had artillery on the northern bank of the Lys near Bac St. Maur, where more guns and infantry were crossing: that he thought a dawn attack might follow: and that he proposed to hold a line from Trou Bayard to near Le Petit Mortier, that is across the salient formed by the fronts of the 150th Bde and the 40th Divn. This line was in fact taken up without interference from the enemy.

In the Bac St. Maur sector, Br.-General H. M. Craigie Halkett (74th Bde), convinced that there must be no delay, had not waited for the corps order issued at 8 A.M. to attack the Germans who had crossed the river. Thus the 119th and 120th Brigade-Battalions did not co-operate. The advance of the 74th Bde was begun at 9 A.M.; but half an hour later the enemy attack broke in between the two leading battalions and at the same time turned their left flank. Fighting continued for several hours, during which the 74th Bde was gradually forced back north-westwards. By 3.30 P.M. its three battalions were widely separated, and the enemy was beginning to encircle Steenwerck, besides working from house to house from the south. With difficulty, the battalions were, by 5 P.M., formed on a concave line north of Steenwerck from the Pont de Pierre (a bridge over the Stil Becque, a mile north-west of Steenwerck, thus marked on the map) to Steenwerck station on the Bailleul—Armentières railway, and thence south-eastwards along the railway.

Towards 6 P.M., the enemy advancing north-westwards along the railway enfiladed the 3/Worcestershire established on it, and this battalion, with the help of the 1/4th Duke of Wellington's (147th Bde), fell back on the 4/Worcestershire of the 88th Brigade (Br.-General B. C. Freyberg), the third brigade of the 29th Division. This brigade, which was just appearing on the field, with a field company R.E., the 1/2nd Monmouthshire (Pioneers), and two companies of the 29th Battalion Machine-Gun Corps, attached, had been delayed in joining the remainder of the division owing to the attacks on the IX. Corps, north of Armentières, to resist which it was temporarily diverted. Being freed from this task, it had subsequently been ordered to continue its journey and so about 4 P.M. had debussed a mile and a half east of Bailleul, amidst a scene of great confusion, as the Armentières road was full of retiring transport, stragglers and refugees. Having deployed, its battalions advanced across the fields south of the road. Br.-General Freyberg

discovered by patrols that Steenwerck was occupied by the Germans, and his men soon came upon field-artillery batteries and two 60-pdrs. which were keeping off the enemy by firing over open sights, without any infantry escort to cover them. He therefore halted his front line about twelve hundred yards north of the village, athwart the railway, where, as related, it encountered the survivors of the 74th Bde. Touch was eventually gained on the right with the 40th Divn, now established about half a mile westward of the Steenwerck Switch,¹ and on the left with the 84th Divn, which had by now evacuated Armentières.

It was not until after midday, when the Germans who had crossed at Bac St. Maur were advancing westwards towards Sailly—and also northwards as they were driving back the 74th Brigade—that any attack against the troops of the 40th Divn in the Steenwerck Switch developed. Commencing on the south this soon became general. By 1.30 P.M. the enemy at the southern end was across the little stream in front of the switch; but, every available man being brought up, the two brigade-battalions of the 40th Divn under Br.-General C. J. Hobkirk (120th Bde) clung to their trenches, in spite of artillery (including 8-inch howitzer) and machine-gun fire, the attack extending northwards as the 74th Bde was gradually forced back. Between 3 and 4 P.M., as elsewhere, the enemy fire greatly increased, and the 40th Divn, with both flanks threatened, deliberately fell back about fifteen hundred yards. No sooner had this position been reached, with the Germans following, than a general counter-attack was made with fixed bayonets to recover the switch. On the average, an advance of five hundred yards was made, and this marked the position held at nightfall. On the right, the 145th A.T. Company R.E. was in touch with the 50th Divn, but on the left there existed a gap of unknown extent, which the hundred sappers of the three field companies were sent to fill. These men were to obtain touch with the 74th Bde and 88th Brigade; but they were unable to do so until the early morning of the 11th.

Meanwhile, Armentières had been evacuated. Except

¹ The 40th Divn, the 121st Bde, being with the 84th Divn, now consisted of the two composite battalions formed by the 119th and 120th Bdes, with the 224th, 229th and 231st Field Companies R.E. numbering only about a hundred men, the pioneer battalion (12/Green Howards), and the 145th Army Troops Company R.E. The 145th Army Troops Company had been engaged on making machine-gun emplacements and on wiring.

for a heavy bombardment of Houplines (north-eastern end of Armentières) with gas and high-explosive shells during the night of the 9th/10th, the 34th Divn (Major-General C. L. Nicholson), covered by the 38th Division artillery, had been left in comparative peace. Still it was obvious that whether or not the Germans extended their attack to the north of the town, for which purpose significant preparations had been detected, the division could not long remain in a sharp salient facing east and south-south-west. The former side was held by two battalions of the 103rd Bde and all three of the 102nd, and it was strong, whereas the opposing Germans were few in number, as the *38th Division* was strung out on a wide front. But against the new long flank facing nearly south, held from the Lys near Fort Rompu by the survivors from yesterday's fight belonging to the 101st and 121st Bdes and the third battalion of the 103rd, in hastily dug trenches, three German divisions had been identified. Officer patrols sent out at dawn reported the enemy to be massing near Fleurbaix and about Bois Grenier, and it was clear that troops were being concentrated for a renewed effort to break the defensive flank which guarded the right of the division.

Soon after 7 A.M. infantry attacked the line of the 101st Bde (Br.-General R. C. Gore) near the river, but the remnants of the 15th and 16/Royal Scots and of the 12/Suffolk (121st Bde) with them resisted stoutly, having been told to hold on at all costs as troops were on the way to reinforce them. A detachment of the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company and F Special (Gas) Company R.E. were thrown into the line, but the 101st Bde was gradually pushed back on the river, losing heavily. In response to Br.-General Gore's appeal for help, the 1/4th Duke of Wellington's of the 147th Brigade (49th Division) from Nieppe (2 miles north-west of Armentières) was sent up at 10 A.M., the other two battalions of the brigade moving into the Nieppe Switch, which lay across both the railway and road between Armentières and Bailleul. The German onslaught, which, by then, had extended eastwards to abreast of Bois Grenier—near which place an assault, involving the 11/Suffolk (121st Bde), had been beaten off at 8.45 A.M.—grew stronger, and the defenders were gradually forced back a mile on Erquinghem (on the Lys, just above Armentières). Here they managed to hold on until after 5 P.M., and this stand, with the co-operation of the 88th Brigade (29th Division), whose opportune arrival near Nieppe has already been mentioned,

enabled the troops in the Armentières salient to get clear. The 101st Bde and the troops with it then crossed the Lys at Erquinghem and formed on its northern bank, with their right a mile to the west of the village. It should have extended a thousand yards further west, but the German force moving forward from Bac St. Maur was already in possession of the ground. The 1/4th Duke of Wellington's, one of whose companies had been cut off and reduced to three officers and 30 men, went on to rejoin its brigade at Nieppe. There, on arrival after 6 P.M., it was employed to drive off the railway some German parties which had followed up the 101st Bde; it was thus able to help the 3/Worcestershire of the 74th.

The orders for the evacuation of Armentières and retirement to the northern bank of the Lys, for which preparations had been made, reached Major-General Nicholson by telephone at 10 A.M.; instructions were immediately sent out to the brigades for the movement to be begun at 3 P.M., the front troops to pass through parties established in position in rear. The 102nd Bde (Br.-General N. A. Thomson) on the left, which received the orders at 11.45 A.M., had no difficulty in getting away. By 6.30 P.M. it had crossed to the northern bank of the Lys by the Pont de Pierre on the Armentières—Bailleul road and emergency bridges north of it; these latter were destroyed at 7 P.M. The 102nd Bde took position for the night along the flat northern bank from the railway bridge northward to beyond the stone bridge, there turning back a flank to make junction with the right of the IX. Corps (Second Army).

The 103rd Bde, and the troops of the 121st with it, in the apex of the salient experienced greater difficulty. Orders for an immediate retirement were sent by Br.-General J. G. Chaplin from 101st Bde headquarters, to which he had been summoned by the 34th Divn; he gave the messengers instructions to run "as hard as God would let them". But they did not reach the 1/E. Lancashire, on the left next to the 102nd Bde, until 2.45 P.M. Nevertheless the battalion succeeded in retiring, although in passing through the ruined streets of Armentières it suffered casualties from heavy shells. The other units did not receive their instructions until after 3.15 P.M., at the same time as those of the 101st Bde, which by then had been driven back on Erquinghem, and the commanding officers, after meeting to settle how they could carry out the movement, had to appeal to the 11/Suffolk, already pushed back

nearly a mile, on the right, to hold on for two hours longer to cover the flank and let them get away. It was agreed to begin the retirement at 4.30 P.M.; but by 3.30 P.M. men on the left had already begun to withdraw, and amended orders were at once issued to ensure an orderly movement. By that time the Germans, observing preparation for withdrawal, had attacked the point of the salient, and the 9/Northumberland Fusiliers and 10/Lincolnshire became involved in a fight in the front trenches; but both battalions, covered by strong rear and flank guards, slipped away, making for the Armentières railway bridge. As they came near the railway south of the town, they found it was enfiladed by machine-gun fire; so, skirting by it, they reached the bridge, only to find that both this and the footbridge left for their passage were down; a few small parties got across on the débris of the railway bridge, but the rest made for the stone road bridge further north,¹ and, after a successful encounter with a German patrol in the streets of Armentières, crossed the river unmolested, being apparently taken by the enemy for advancing German troops. One hostile company did approach the bridge, and, taking cover behind some boxes of Mills bombs, experienced an unpleasant surprise when the bridge guard concentrated fire on the boxes. At 10.25 P.M., after a halt, both the 103rd and 121st Bdes moved back to line up behind the railway between the 88th Brigade and the 102nd Bde; by this means they, together with the 147th Brigade and the stragglers collected in the dark by the 207th and 209th Field Companies R.E., were able to complete the line of defence round the Bac St. Maur bridgehead which the Germans had enlarged during the day.

The 34th Divn had escaped from Armentières, where the enemy had designed to cut it off, but it was still in a nasty, even narrower, salient, in which were crowded troops of eight brigades, the 88th, 101st, 147th, 121st, 103rd, 102nd, 56th and 75th, the last two belonging to the 19th and 25th Divns of the IX. Corps, Second Army. For once, no rations were received, except such, including champagne, as might be found in the various institutions and canteens in Armentières. The failure was due to ignorance of the

¹ Orders had been issued at 6.30 P.M. to destroy the stone bridge after the 102nd Bde had crossed, but Major J. Russell, commanding the 208th Field Company R.E., which had been detailed to demolish all the bridges, road and railway, from Houplines to Pont de Nieppe, decided to wait. Remaining, with a small party of sappers, he did not fire the charge until 10.40 P.M.

location of, even, brigades, rather than to any breakdown of the supply system.

It may be added that throughout the fighting, which was to last to the end of the month, the administrative system was severely taxed owing to the hodge-podge of divisions, brigades and units. Nevertheless, thanks to the forethought and great exertions of the services concerned both ammunition and supplies continued to reach the troops and the wounded to be evacuated.

Map 16.
Sketch
18.

We come now to the fighting north of Armentières, to which the official name of the Battle of Messines has been given. The front occupied by the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. H. Gordon) of the Second Army—extending from the Lys to Shrewsbury Forest, a mile north of the Ypres—Comines canal—was 17,000 yards in length and held, from right to left, by the 25th Divn (Major-General Sir E. G. T. Bainbridge), the 19th Divn (Major-General G. D. Jeffreys) and the 9th Divn (Major-General H. H. Tudor). All these three divisions had lost more than half of their fighting strength in the March battle, and were still in the process of refitting.¹ Besides the divisional field artillery, the corps was supported by 105 heavy guns, taken over from the Australian Corps;² these were in

¹ The Staff of the IX. Corps had arrived at Flêtre on 4th April from the French Sixth Army area, where, for nearly two months, it had been studying arrangements for the intervention of British troops if any were sent to the French front (see "1918" Vol. I., p. 101), and then engaged in organizing a back line. Previous to this, the IX. Corps Staff had been responsible for the front from the Lys to Shrewsbury Forest for nearly two years, and it was therefore perfectly familiar with the ground and its defences.

The 25th Divn had entrained in Picardy on 30th and 31st March for Caestre (5 miles west of Bailleul), and had gone into the line on arrival. Its artillery had remained with the New Zealand Division until 7th April, and had not yet arrived; it was covered by 3 Army field artillery brigades, XI., II. New Zealand and XXXVIII., under its own C.R.A., Br.-General K. J. Kincaid-Smith.

The 19th Divn had entrained on the 29th, and had taken over on 30th/31st March.

For the 9th Divn, the corresponding dates had been, 1st April and 3rd/4th April.

The drafts to bring the divisions up to establishment—except for the S. African Bde of the 9th Divn, which received none and was only 1,800 strong—had been almost entirely composed of lads of 19, with 9 months' training; they had arrived daily in large batches, and had not been in all cases actually distributed to battalions. As they were so very young, a portion had been kept back in the corps area for a further 3 months' training, so that no battalion was up to establishment.

²	15-inch howitzer	1
	12-inch „	8
	9.2-inch „	10

position north-west of Messines Ridge. In theory the defences had been reorganized on the zone system, but this receives no mention in the accounts of the fighting. They consisted of a front position, comprising usually two lines of small posts, all well wired, and a third, continuous, line, on the low ground in front of and on the forward slopes of Messines Ridge.¹ About three or four thousand yards in rear of this was the "Corps Line" (front of Battle Zone), on the reverse slopes of Hill 63 and Messines Ridge, running behind Wytschaete and thence to Zillebeke and Hooze. About three thousand yards in rear of this again was an "Army Line" (Green Line), passing by Le Romarin, Neuve Eglise and Kemmel to Ypres. The use of small posts in the forward positions was forced on the defence because the ground was a waste of waterlogged shell holes—a result of the 1917 operations—and a continuous trench was out of the question. Communications were restricted to trench-board walks protected by breastworks; and in daylight it was impossible to move about in the forward position. The front line was very conspicuous, and some brigades, when taking over from the Australian Corps, asked permission to hold the better concealed support line; but this was refused by the IX. Corps.

The 25th Divn had both remaining brigades, 75th (Br.-General C. C. Hannay) and 7th (Br.-General C. J. Griffin), each with a machine-gun company, in the front position.² The 19th Divn similarly had the 57th Bde (Br.-General T. A. Cubitt) and 58th Bde (Br.-General A. E. Glasgow) in front line, and the 56th Bde (temporarily under Lieut.-Colonel R. M. Heath, who was appointed Br.-General on the 18th April), with the 9/Cheshire absent attached to

8-inch howitzer	.	.	.	.	18
6-inch "	.	.	.	.	52
6-inch guns	.	.	.	.	4
60-pdr. "	.	.	.	.	12

The German *Fourth Army*, which attacked the corps, had 60 heavy batteries, therefore more than twice the number of British pieces. Its field artillery numbered 73 batteries against the IX. Corps's 24. Goes, "Kemmel".

¹ Many of these posts were covered with wire-netting camouflage screens to protect them from air observation, which in many cases, after being twisted by shell-fire, greatly hampered the garrison when the enemy closed on them suddenly in the mist. In another corps it was judged from photographs that the screens rendered the works conspicuous from the air, so they were removed and reliance for a certain amount of immunity from fire placed on numerous dummy posts.

² The 74th Bde had been sent on the 9th to reinforce the 34th Divn. See page 184.

the 34th Divn, in reserve. The 9th Divn had only the 27th Bde (Br.-General W. D. Croft), with two machine-gun companies in the front system; the 26th (Br.-General J. Kennedy) and S. African Bde (Br.-General W. E. C. Tanner) were in reserve, behind the 58th Bde of the 19th Divn. Each brigade had two battalions, except the 57th, which had all three, distributed in depth; the guns of the divisional machine-gun battalions were arranged to cover the ground between the principal lines and form the framework of the defence. The signal communications were good, and remained good, as a deep buried system prepared for the Messines offensive in April 1917 was available.

That the enemy's preparations for attack against the IX. Corps sector were completed had become evident. The 9th April, however, had passed quietly on this front; the fact that the 9th Divn was shelled severely between 1 and 3 A.M. on the 10th, whilst the 27th Bde was taking over half a mile of front from the 19th Divn, had no significance: there was nothing but the state of the enemy's preparations to indicate that an attack was imminent. Patrols during the night of the 9th/10th reported nothing unusual except the discharge of an abnormal number of Very lights, as if to scare off anyone approaching the German lines; an unnecessary firing of machine guns (designed possibly to cover the noise of bridging); and a certain amount of extra wagon movement (probably pontoon wagons) near Pont Rouge on the Lys, east of the south-eastern corner of Ploegsteert Wood. Later, at 5 A.M., a patrol of the 11/Cheshire (75th Bde) came in and reported that it had discovered several plank bridges laid on piles about a foot under water in the Lys. These signs, in the absence of others, were regarded merely as part of a demonstration intended to prevent the despatch of troops to the battle farther south. But, in view of the probability of the 34th Divn (XV. Corps), in the Armentières defences, having to fall back during the 10th, orders had been given at 8.20 P.M. on the 9th by Major-General Bainbridge for the 25th Divn to send a detachment to form a defensive flank to cover its own right rear and the retreat northwards of any troops of the 34th Divn. This detachment, which was placed under the 75th Bde, consisted of the 105th, 106th and 107th Field Companies R.E., the 6/South Wales Borderers (Pioneers), and two companies of the 2/S. Lancashire (75th Bde)—these units constituting in the absence of the 74th Bde the whole reserve of the division. By 2 A.M. this

detachment had taken position and was entrenching on the northern bank of the loop of the Lys north of the western end of Armentières, from Vanne to Le Bizet. Such a measure was thought advisable since this section of the river could easily be bridged by the enemy, if he made good use of the hedges to approach unseen. Half an hour later, the enemy bombardment began south of the Lys against the First Army, and at 2.45 A.M., north of it against part of the IX. Corps front between the Lys and the Wambeke stream, the boundary between the 57th and 58th Bdes. Fire continued until 5.15 A.M., being shorter and less violent than in the previous great attacks, but of the same character: first gas shelling of batteries, then high-explosive shelling of headquarters, cross roads, and observing stations and in this case of rest camps and hutments, of which there were many. During the last quarter of an hour fire was concentrated on the front defences. In the darkness and rain, the British artillery could only reply by firing on roads and areas where it was suspected the enemy would concentrate for attack.

The ground mist, which came on early, certainly favoured the Germans at the outset of the operations. Under cover of it they were not only able to assemble their troops, and bring forward pontoons to the Lys, but also to cross the river unperceived, although it ran roughly parallel to the front line of the 25th Divn, from Frélinghien to Warneton, and only half a mile east of it. In the first rush, the attackers, carrying planks for crossing the cratered area, overran or passed between many of the forward posts of the 75th, 7th and 57th Bdes, and then dealt from flanks and rear with those that held out. Some of the posts refused to give in long after they were surrounded; in particular one of the 6/Wiltshire (58th Bde) resisted for 48 hours, when the garrison at length escaped in the morning fog. The first information some battalion commanders received of the attack came either in the shape of messages from their support companies to the effect that the front companies had been overwhelmed, or of actual hand-to-hand encounters taking place round their own headquarters. In such fighting, the initial confusion and lack of information are very great, and, particularly when there are many young soldiers in the defenders' ranks, numbers are bound to tell. The two brigades of the 25th were faced by three German divisions (214th, 31st and 49th Reserve), and the 57th Bde by one (17th Reserve), with three others (11th Bavarian, 36th

Reserve and *22nd Reserve*) to support them ; the 57th Bde, indeed, was attacked, according to identifications and prisoners' statements, by two storm and eleven other battalions, that is at odds of five or six to one. So fast did some of the German parties come on that they soon entered Ploegsteert Wood ; while in Messines they bombed two sections of the 81st Field Company R.E., in dug-outs, before any alarm had been raised. Nevertheless, a stout resistance was offered, and counter-attacks were made, in one of which the remnants of the two sections above mentioned were rescued. Heavy toll too was taken of the enemy, which damped his ardour and eventually brought him to a standstill, after an advance which attained a maximum depth of about four thousand yards, and an average depth of about half that distance ; but from Ploegsteert Wood (inclusive) southwards he was across the Corps Line. The losses of the British front units were heavy, only one officer and 21 men of the two companies of the 8/Border Regiment (75th Bde) on the right of the line escaping ; the company of the 1/Wiltshire (7th Bde) in La Basse Ville (just south of Warneton), in the front line, held out until 8.35 A.M., when the few survivors, having expended all their ammunition and bombs, were forced to surrender.

Information of the situation came back slowly, and was, only too often, inaccurate. Still, as soon as possible, arrangements were made to counter-attack. At 6.35 A.M. Br.-General C. C. Hannay (75th Bde), learning that both his front battalions were being driven in, ordered the flank detachment (engineer companies and pioneer battalion) to leave the Lys position and move to restore the situation, anticipating by forty minutes a divisional order to the same effect. The detachment moved off under fire, chiefly from machine guns, and deployed ; but in view of the danger which had now arisen on his left owing to the Germans having penetrated into Ploegsteert Wood, Br.-General Hannay, by means of verbal orders passed along the line, cancelled the counter-attack and ordered the detachment, with his last reserve, the remaining two companies of the 2/S. Lancashire, to take position west of Ploegsteert. There two hundred men of the 134th Army Troops Company R.E., and the 1st Army Troops Company Australian Engineers joined them, along with the 9/Cheshire (56th Bde), from the XV. Corps area, which at 10 A.M. had been placed at the disposal of the 25th Divn, and handed on to Br.-General Hannay.

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The 7th and 57th Bdes, similarly, were driven back, the two front companies of the 8/Gloucestershire (57th Bde) being cut off. Br.-General Griffin tried in vain with his third battalion, the 10/Cheshire, to recover Ploegsteert Wood. Likewise Br.-General Cubitt (57th Bde), after having ordered his Corps Line to be manned by part of the divisional engineers and pioneers, failed to recapture Messines by an attack of two companies of the 8/North Staffordshire (the only remaining battalion of the 56th Bde, as the 4/Shropshire L.I. had been sent to support the 7th Bde) lent to him from the 19th Divn reserve. But these troops reached the outskirts of the village and captured two machine guns and a few prisoners.

Fire at short range through the lifting mist now kept the Germans from making further rapid progress, and this resistance was considerably aided by the artillery of the 19th and 9th Divns, and the three Army brigades with the 25th Divn. The guns not only remained in action until the infantry were pressed back in line with them, but the artillery officers undertook to keep the guns in action as long as the infantry remained.¹ The batteries were either shooting or moving back, always keeping some guns in action. In contrast to the conditions of the retirement of the Fifth Army in March, the artillery, both field and heavy, was well served by communications from front to rear. This was due to the existence of buried signal cables which rendered possible the employment of forward observing officers to report situations at the front, locate enemy concentrations, and ensure co-operation with the infantry.

Behind the resistance offered by the infantry and artillery further reserve lines were organized. By 1 P.M., the line of the 75th Bde—its right being still protected as the evacuation of Armentières was not begun until 3 P.M.—extended from the Lys west of Le Bizet, northward by Regina Farm (west of Ploegsteert) to Hill 63 and the north-west corner of Ploegsteert Wood. From this point the 7th Bde had been in position since 11 A.M., when the fighting had quieted down; its front extended along the north side of the wood, and then northward to the Douve, whence the 57th Bde carried on the line along the ridge, west of Messines but east of Wytschaete. Behind this last brigade, a reserve line had been formed, under Major-General Jeffreys' direction,

¹ For such behaviour and inspiring example, Captain E. S. Dougall, commanding A Battery LXXXVIII. Bde R.F.A. (19th Divn) was awarded a Victoria Cross posthumously, he being killed four days later.

by the 94th Field Company R.E., about a thousand yards in rear of the Corps Line, from in front of Wulverghem to west of Wyttschaete. This line was occupied by the last two companies of the 8/North Staffordshire, along with a detachment of 700 drafts for the 19th Divn, properly organized by officers and men sent back for the purpose, and 12 machine guns.

On the left of the 57th Bde, the 58th Bde (Br.-General A. E. Glasgow) and the 27th Bde (Br.-General W. D. Croft) had been shelled during a relief, and later from 3 to 5.30 A.M., but they were not attacked until between 1 and 2 P.M., when the ground mist was forming again. By this time the 58th Bde had formed a defensive right flank in consequence of the retirement of the 57th. The enemy overran the front line posts of the 27th Bde and of the left battalion of the 58th, but was brought to a stop against the continuous and strongly wired support line of the 27th Bde, his dead being thickly piled up against the wire.¹ On learning the position of the 27th Bde, Br.-General Glasgow ordered both his front line battalions back to the support line. The 9/Royal Welch Fusiliers had already arrived there, but the message failed to reach the 6/Wiltshire, which was on the right.

Although German snipers were active, no great change took place in the general situation of the IX. Corps after these incidents, except on the right, where the initiative passed to the British. Heavy losses alone can have prevented the German *Fourth Army* from carrying out the special task allotted to it overnight of "helping the *Sixth Army* over the Lys, and for that purpose pressing forward "with the left wing in the direction of Nieppe and Steenwerck".² In anticipation of such a movement, Major-General Bainbridge (25th Divn) had sent an order, at 11.35 A.M., to the 75th Bde, which was received at 1.5 P.M., to hold at all costs the line Vanne (on the Lys)—Ploegsteert—St. Yves (at the north-eastern corner of Ploegsteert Wood)—eastern slopes of Messines Ridge in its sector. Except on the extreme right, the front of the 75th Bde then ran considerably west of the line mentioned.

At 3.50 P.M., therefore, Br.-General Hannay began to make arrangements for a counter-attack with a view to reaching a line about seven hundred yards east of Ploegsteert. An hour later, a party of 3 officers and 40 men of

¹ To conform with corps orders and with the disposition of his neighbours, Major-General Tudor had held a front line of posts, but relied on the support line for resistance.

² Schwarte iii., pp. 440-1.

the 8/Border Regiment, after being left behind east of Ploegsteert, came in and reported that the village was full of Germans resting and feeding, who had offered no opposition to them passing through, so the prospects of success seemed good. The counter-attack, in which the 1st Army Troops Company Australian Engineers joined, began at 5.30 P.M. Two companies of the 10/Cheshire (7th Bde) co-operated on the left and drove southwards through Ploegsteert Wood, against which locality a counter-attack by one company, far too weak a force for the purpose, had already failed. The right, however, was not ready, owing to a delay in the receipt of orders, and hung back; yet, in spite of heavy machine-gun fire in front and from the right, on which flank the Germans could use enfilade fire from Le Bizet, the 75th Bde was not brought to a standstill until it was within two hundred yards of Ploegsteert village. This position could not be maintained, and the troops fell back to their starting line. The 25th Divn subsequently ordered that the extreme right should be brought back to Vanne; later, this flank was further swung back to find touch on the right with the 147th Bde in the Nieppe Switch.

The position of the 7th Bde, taken up before 11 A.M. in front of the Corps Line, remained unchanged; but, in view of the enemy strength, it could do no more than send a couple of companies to co-operate in the counter-attack of the 75th. Assistance was, however, on the way. At 8.10 A.M., the S. African Bde (1,300 strong) of the 9th Divn had been detailed to form the IX. Corps reserve, and at 9.15 A.M. had marched to Neuve Eglise, where it arrived about midday, and was allotted to the 19th Divn. At 1.30 P.M. orders reached Br.-General Tanner from Major-General Jeffreys to counter-attack from the east of Wulverghem (2 miles west of Messines) and recapture Messines Ridge from the village as far north as Lumm Farm, a frontage of fifteen hundred yards. Hearing of this, the commander of the 9th Divn protested, pointing out that the S. African Bde was newly constituted and consisted mainly of recruits, as the original brigade had been annihilated in the March battle, and that, though a fine body of men, it was not yet trained for offensive action. His protest was disregarded. At 5.15 P.M., the tiny brigade advanced from Wulverghem to the Steenebeek, at the foot of the slope of the ridge, and then deployed. Attacking under an excellent barrage fired by the LXXXVII. Brigade R.F.A. over new and unregistered ground, by 8 P.M. the right battalion was through

Messines and the left down the eastern slopes of the ridge : they checked the German advance but were unable to maintain their position, and fell back to the 57th Bde line west of the village.¹

On the northern flank (58th and 27th Bdes), no serious attack materialized after 2 P.M., the enemy keeping at a distance, though endeavouring to work round the right flank, left open by the retirement of the 57th Bde. Major-General Tudor accordingly moved the 9/Seaforth Highlanders (Pioneers) to the Damstrasse, a deep, waterlogged cutting, the reserve line of the 58th Bde, in order to cover this flank. At 4 P.M., the 58th Bde, by corps orders, passed from the 19th to the command of the 9th Divn, and Major-General Tudor presently moved up the rest of the 26th Bde (which, until 3 P.M., had been for a time at the disposal of the 19th Divn) to keep connection between the 57th and the 27th. A crisis had arisen in the 58th. At 4.30 P.M. the 6/Wiltshire, having at last received the order to withdraw to the support trenches, began to carry it out. The Germans, encouraged by the sight of this retirement, followed up the battalion. They were prevented by fire from approaching within six to eight hundred yards, so worked round both flanks, with the result that the greater part of the Wiltshire and a company of the 9/R. Welch Fusiliers on their right, were cut off, Lieut.-Colonel G. Monreal of the Wiltshire being killed. Pressing on by the south, the Germans also broke up three companies of the 9/Welch around Wytschaete. Thus, as darkness fell, the line of the 58th Bde was completely dislocated, and its survivors were collected near the Damstrasse, to which place was despatched the 5/Cameron Highlanders (26th Bde), in reserve at Vierstraat, west of Wytschaete. Before this happened Br.-General Kennedy had sent a strong Cameron patrol to clear up the situation in Wytschaete. Finding the village unoccupied, the patrol, by his orders, remained there and staved off its capture by the Germans until, as will be seen, reinforcements arrived. It was a most important service.

¹ In May and June, when Lieut.-General A. H. Gordon (IX. Corps) and his troops were under French command in the Aisne sector, he learnt of the French system of "citations", that is the mention in orders of any action, on the part of a distinct unit or formation, of outstanding merit in a tactical operation which beneficially influenced the course of a battle. He decided to adopt the system. Six such mentions, or "records", as they were called, were made in IX. Corps orders, the S. African Brigade obtaining the first for its action on this occasion.

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In view of this critical situation on the left, the 62nd Bde (Br.-General G. H. Gater) of the 21st Divn, in reserve south of Ypres, was at 10.10 P.M. placed by Lieut.-General Godley at the disposal of Major-General Tudor.¹ At 1 A.M. on the 11th, the brigade reached Vierstraat (1½ miles north-west of Wytschaete), with orders to recapture Wytschaete and fill the line between the 57th and 27th Bdes, in which there still were two weak battalions of the 26th and fragments of the 58th. Following a conference between the commanders of the 26th, 57th and 62nd Bdes, the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers and 2/Lincolnshire were sent forward against Wytschaete. After reaching the top of the ridge and entering the village, Germans, hitherto kept off by the Cameron patrol, were encountered pushing their way up with machine-gun detachments and infantry. The advanced guards rushed them, and, after half an hour's hand-to-hand fighting, during which the enemy's artillery put down a barrage on the mêlée, the Germans were forced to retire. By 5 A.M. the whole of Wytschaete was recovered.

Thus by the early morning of the 11th, the IX. Corps had formed a continuous line from the left of the XV. Corps in the Nieppe Switch, behind Armentières, northward, west of the village of Ploegsteert, to the western edge of Ploegsteert Wood; thence it ran forward along the northern edge of the wood to St. Yves, and thence, again northward, along Messines Ridge, excluding Messines village but including Wytschaete, to within two thousand yards of St. Eloi, where it turned north-eastward to join the old front line a couple of miles short of Gheluvelt. The front was thinly held by a variety of units of different brigades and divisions, all of which had suffered heavy casualties since the 21st March, while in reserve were only the 148th Brigade and 108th Bde. These two brigades had reached the IX. Corps during the day as reinforcements from the 49th Division and 36th (Ulster) Divn respectively, each with a field company R.E., a machine-gun company and a field ambulance attached to it.² The former was retained in corps

¹ The 21st Divn (less artillery) had entrained in Picardy on 1st April, and been brought north. On 3rd April it rested and received reinforcements, and on the 4th/5th two brigades went into the line north of the 9th Divn. On the morning of 10th April, the 110th Bde was in the line, the 62nd Bde in camp near Mount Kemmel, and the 64th Bde in reserve just south of Ypres, the two latter in the XXII. Corps area. During the afternoon, the 62nd had marched north to join the 64th.

² It had been intended to transfer the whole 49th Division from the XXII. Corps (Second Army) to the First Army, and the 147th Brigade had already joined the XV. Corps; but, owing to the attack on the Second

reserve near Neuve Eglise, the latter was placed at the disposal of the 19th Divn, which at 12.20 A.M. attached it to the 57th Bde, so that Br.-General Cubitt now had command of all troops on or west of Messines Ridge south of Pick House, just south of Wytschaete.

Of the 105 pieces of the heavy artillery, all but 19 had been withdrawn by order to new positions, the 60-pdrs. and 6-inch howitzers moving last and finally remaining with the field artillery. Of the guns lost, some were damaged by shell fire, others fired as long as possible and were then blown up; the four heaviest pieces could not be dismantled in time on account of the difficulties of soft ground.

By using composite motor ambulance convoys, lorries from the corps and Army, and rail when possible, the main dressing stations and casualty clearing stations had been cleared of all wounded and sick within 24 hours.

In spite of the unfavourable weather, poor visibility and low clouds, and although many squadrons were compelled to pack up and move back to new aerodromes in great haste, there was a fair amount of air activity during the middle of the day, though losses from the ground were appreciable. The direction of the enemy attack and the gradual slowing down of the advance were duly reported. The fighter squadrons were used for low-flying attacks, but had fewer easy targets near the front than usual, as the enemy moved in small parties. More success was attained against transport and marching columns. There were a few fights, although the Germans seemed to prefer reserving their airmen to worry the troops at night.

It appeared now that if the enemy should pause, as he had done between his attacks at "First Ypres" in 1914, there would be time to reorganize, and for French reinforcements to arrive. On the other hand, if the Germans continued their offensive next day, the prospect was gloomy.

During the day, and on every subsequent day during the battle, the Army commander, General Plumer, found

Army on the morning of the 10th, the 146th Brigade had been kept in the line, and the 148th was not released until 10 A.M. It debussed just west of Neuve Eglise around 1 P.M.

The 36th (Ulster) Divn formed part of the II. Corps, the left of the Second Army. At midday its reserve brigade (the 108th) was ordered by bus from north-west of Ypres to Kemmel, where it arrived around 4 P.M.

This brigade had been reduced to less than 400 of all ranks in the March fighting and had been filled up with about 800, men from all parts of the United Kingdom and A.S.C. men from the base without infantry training.

time to visit all divisional headquarters. As one divisional commander said, "it would be hard to exaggerate the good "these visits did in cheering us all up, giving us information and creating an atmosphere of confidence and "encouragement".

On the previous day, the 9th April, the problem of providing reserves for the First Army had been very difficult, and was only partly solved by drawing on the Second Army. The extension of the enemy attack on the 10th to embrace part of the Second Army, and the consequent necessity of reinforcing General Sir H. Plumer as well as Sir H. Horne, made the whole question of reserves one of the utmost urgency. About 9 A.M. Sir Douglas Haig had given instructions for the movement northwards of the very last divisions which he dared withdraw from Picardy: two cavalry divisions, with Cavalry Corps headquarters, from south of the Somme to a position between Doullens and St. Pol; ¹ the 33rd Division (Major-General R. J. Pinney) from the First Army to the Second; ² and the 5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stephens) from the Third Army to the First.³

At the conference held on the 7th April, it had been decided that part of the Fourth (Fifth) Army should co-operate in a French advance south of the Somme; now, owing to the situation in Flanders, Sir Douglas Haig had to inform General Sir H. Rawlinson that no troops could be spared for this operation except the 5th Australian Brigade, which might be employed to cover the French left near Hangard. In his extremity, having provided the First and Second Armies with all he could from the means at his disposal, he turned again to General Foch. He wrote to him at 11.30 A.M. calling his attention to the situation north of the La Bassée canal, and to the latest developments north of Armentières; and asking him "to relieve part of the "British front and take an active part in the battle", in order to free some troops to form a reserve.

The Commander-in-Chief's letter crossed a Note addressed to him by General Foch, in which the latter

¹ The warning telephone message was received at Cavalry Corps headquarters at 9.30 A.M.; the order to move at 12.20 P.M. The time of despatch cannot be traced.

² The 33rd Division had been in the Passchendaele sector of the Second Army; on 6th and 7th April it had moved to the XVII. Corps (recently transferred from the Third to the First Army, but retaining its place in the line near Arras).

³ The 5th Division, on arrival from Italy, had been sent to the Third Army on 7th April.

requested to be informed what directives had been given to the First and Second Armies, and what troops were available, or had already been sent, to reinforce them, so that he might be kept "au courant" with the intentions and wants of the British command. General Foch emphasized the importance of holding the present front both near Arras and in Flanders, "as any voluntary retirements, as, for instance, from the crest of the ridge at Passchendaele, "would only be interpreted by the enemy as a sign of weakness and an incitement to the offensive; therefore no troops should withdraw unless forced to do so by a direct attack of the enemy". He concluded by saying that he would see General Pétain as regards increasing the number of French troops eventually to be employed north of the Somme.

Sir Douglas Haig replied to the Note by stating that the First and Second Armies had been instructed to maintain their present front, "approximately from the Passchendaele ridge—Wytschaete—Messines—the line of the rivers Lys and Lawe to Lestrem and thence to Givenchy", at all costs, and he detailed the steps which he was taking to reinforce the two Armies.

In the early afternoon, before he had received Sir Douglas Haig's 11.30 A.M. letter, General Foch paid a visit to General Pétain at his advanced headquarters at Beauvais. The latter had already been informed that General Rawlinson would not be able to give much help in the projected offensive; but General Foch now insisted that the operation was not to be abandoned on that account, and "ought to be carried out none the less by the French forces in order to capture the front Moreuil—Demuin, prolonging the objective to the north if necessary to Point 95 [a mile north of Demuin, on the opposite side of the Luce], which the British should attack and the French take over".¹ At the same time, he told General Pétain of the new situation created by the German offensive, and handed him the following Note :

"In view of eventual intervention north of the Somme, in order to help the British, whilst still retaining the possibility of action south of the Somme, the time has come to push the Groupement Maistre (Tenth Army) without delay to the Somme, from Picquigny to Amiens, and then north of that river in direction of the front Doullens—Acheux; the Groupement Micheler (Fifth Army) will

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 432.

"follow the Groupement Maistre, the tails [*sic*] of its "columns to be on the line Beauvais—Breteuil."

On his return to Sarcus at the end of the afternoon, General Foch found Sir Douglas Haig's letter of 11.30 A.M., and, in the late evening, accompanied by General Weygand, went to see him at Montreuil. Arriving about 10 P.M., he said that, after full consideration, he now agreed that the enemy's objective was the British Army and that the main effort would be made between the Somme and Arras: a relief of the British troops would involve a delay unpermissible in the circumstances: he had therefore decided to move up a large force of French troops ready to intervene, if necessary, on the Arras front.

Sir Douglas Haig having accepted this decision, plans to give effect to it were immediately drawn up by French and British staff officers in conjunction, in the form of a Note by General Foch addressed to Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig; this was followed by G.H.Q. orders, issued at 11 P.M.

The Note stated that the Tenth Army (General Maistre), four divisions and three cavalry divisions strong, would on the 12th be moved up astride the Somme from Picquigny to Amiens ready to advance in the direction of Doullens—Acheux. The G.H.Q. orders directed all Armies to hold their ground and check any advance by the enemy, as French troops were moving north to their assistance, and gave the information that the two leading French divisions would cross the Somme west of Amiens on the 12th, closely followed by other divisions; in addition, the French 133rd Division (Fifth Army) would proceed by rail on the 11th to Bergues (seven miles south of Dunkirk), where it would be behind the Belgian Army. As regards British movements, besides arrangements being made to clear the area west of Amiens required by the French, the 3rd Cavalry Divn, which received its orders at 1.38 A.M., was to march at once from south of the Somme to rejoin the remainder of the Cavalry Corps in G.H.Q. reserve in the Third Army area: the 1st Australian Division was to move by rail from the Fourth (Fifth) Army area to G.H.Q. reserve in the Second Army, and be disposed in the first instance to cover Hazebrouck.¹

The measures to clear the zone required by the French Army were already in hand, but it took a little longer to remove the British troops and their war apparatus than

¹ This Note and operation orders are given in Appendices 7 and 8.

anticipated. The evacuation was carried out in two stages : first of the western and southern portions, on the 11th, and of the remainder by noon on the 12th. This delay brought complaints from the French,¹ but, in reality, does not seem to have had any effect on the northward movement of the French troops from their cantonments. The II. Cavalry Corps (General Robillot), echeloned in depth near the coast 30 miles or more west of Amiens, on the left bank of the Bresle,² began moving forward on the 10th April, the 2nd Cavalry Division leading, followed on the 11th by the 8rd, and on the 12th by the 6th ; the XIV. Corps (General Marjoulet) of General Maistre's Army had its four divisions (14th, 34th, 129th and 154th) on a south-east—north-west line running through Beauvais, the division nearest to Amiens being 28 miles from the Somme, and the farthest (actually on the march from the south) 20 miles or more behind the foremost one. None of the three leading divisions moved from their billets until the 12th, so that at least a day was lost by the French infantry.³

There was no action on the 10th April on the front of the British Fourth and Third Armies, or on that of the French Armies. General Fayolle (G.A.R.) directed that artillery preliminaries of attack should be begun on the 11th by the French First Army against the plateau of the Farm Anchin in the direction of Moreuil, in which two battalions of the 17th Division were to be employed.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 10TH APRIL

Map 16. The *Sixth Army* (General von Quast) resumed its advance about 6 A.M. The *II. Bavarian Corps*, the right of the *Sixth Army*, had managed during the night of the 9th/10th in spite of all difficulties to bring up enough artillery and ammunition to enable the attack to be continued. It forced a crossing over the Lys near Erquinghem and pushed on towards Nieppe and Steenwerck. The last-named village was captured by the *10th Ersatz Division*. On the right of this division the *32nd Division* reached Chapelle d'Armentières and Erquinghem. On the left the *11th Reserve Division* reached Le Petit Mortier (2,500 yards north of Sailly). The *XIX. Corps* attacked on either side of Estaires and forced a passage across the river there, reaching the line Le Petit Mortier—La Gorgue.

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 435, 439.

² The Bresle flows into the sea near Eu, 20 miles west of Abbeville.

³ F.O.A. vi. (i.) Map 31B, and Order of Battle volume.

Further south the right of the *8th Bavarian Reserve Division* (*LV. Corps*) had during the night 9th/10th forced its way into Pont Riqueul (loop of the Lawe), and by 9 A.M. on the 10th had gained complete possession of it. South of that point other troops of the division filtered across the Lawe into the bend of the river, and after the capture of Pont Riqueul turned northwards against Lestrem. The attack failed, mainly owing to the fire directed against the left flank of the attacking forces, and was stopped by corps headquarters. During the morning of the 10th the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* mopped up the groups of houses and strongpoints south of Bout Deville and in doing so captured four heavy guns (in the old Portuguese area). There were, however, so many machine guns in Vieille Chapelle and along the west bank of the Lawe north of the village that the advance came to a standstill between Fosse and the cross roads north of Vieille Chapelle. South-west of the last named village the *1st Bavarian Reserve Regiment* of the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* with the help of the engineers had thrown footbridges over the Lawe canal during the night, and three companies had crossed, but they were insufficient to capture Vieille Chapelle. Farther south still the *18th Reserve Division* was not able to force the passage of the canal.

In order to get the attack moving again the *LV. Corps* in the evening of the 10th brought forward the *16th Division*, hitherto in second line, between the *8th* and *1st Bavarian Reserve Divisions*. This division reached La Croix Marmuse (one mile west of Fosse; its western part was held by the 50th Divn), and during the night some of the *8th Bavarian Reserve Division* reached Lestrem. The *IV. Corps* made no appreciable progress at Festubert and Givenchy. All along the front the British counter-attacked strongly. Every effort was made by O.H.L. and Crown Prince Rupprecht to provide reinforcements for the *Sixth Army*, mainly from the *Seventeenth Army*. The *Sixth Army* issued orders to the *II. Bavarian* and *XIX. Corps* for the 11th April that the high ground on which Bailleul, Meteren and Strazeele stand should be captured. The *LV.* and *IV. Corps* were to continue their attacks and capture the crossings of the La Bassée canal and river Clarence.

Within the zone of the German *Fourth Army* (General Sixt von Armin), of which the left boundary ran just north of Frélinghien, almost exactly opposite that between the British First and Second Armies, the bombardment began at 2.45 A.M. and the infantry attack at 5.15 A.M. Two corps were engaged—the *XVIII. Reserve* on the north, and the *X. Reserve* south of it. Each had two divisions in the line, the former the *7th Division* and the *17th Reserve Division*, the latter the *31st* and *214th Divisions*. Two more were in Army reserve—the *49th Reserve Division* behind the left flank of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* and the *36th Reserve Division* behind the *X. Reserve Corps*. Yet another two—the *11th Bavarian* and *22nd Reserve Divisions*—were in reserve to O.H.L., a short distance east of Armentières.

The Army diary gives the following picture of the fighting on the 10th April. "... Pontoon bridges across the Lys were swung [in the "morning mist] at Frélinghien and at Pont Rouge [a mile and a half "farther north]. . . . The *7th Division*, whose front extended from "Hollebeke to the Houthem—Wyttschaete road, had, by the evening, "reached the line: park north-west of Hollebeke—Bug Farm.

"The *17th Reserve Division* captured Messines by concentric attack from north and south, and then advanced astride the Messines—Wyttschaete road to within 800 metres of the last village, where it ran into stout opposition. Moreover during the evening it sustained violent counter-attacks, partly coming from west of the Steenebeek, and carried out four times in succession with large forces [two battalions]. The *49th Reserve Division*, engaged during the course of the day between Messines and the Douve, was employed as soon as it arrived to help in this defensive action.

"The right of the *31st Division* pushed forward to the east side of the Ploegsteert—Messines road, but its left flank was brought to a standstill in front of the edge of Ploegsteert Wood by the solid resistance of the enemy backed up by machine guns. The right of the *214th Division* captured Ploegsteert and repulsed several hostile counter-attacks in the evening; the left, in spite of violent fire from Armentières and Houplines reached Le Bizet. In the Ypres Salient the position remained unchanged. . . ."

At 8.10 A.M. the *36th Reserve* and *49th Reserve Divisions* were placed at the disposal of the *X. Reserve* and *XVIII. Reserve Corps* respectively. At 10.45 A.M. General von Lossberg (Chief of Staff *Fourth Army*) telephoned to General von Kuhl (Chief of Staff to Prince Rupprecht) the following resumé of the situation :

17th Reserve Division was north and south of Messines; the position in the village itself was doubtful. The division was engaged in repelling violent counter-attacks coming from the west. *31st Division* right flank advancing south of the Douve, but no further news as to the line reached. Left flank after hard fighting had captured the sugar refinery at La Basse Ville. *214th Division* had crossed the railway and was advancing westwards. *36th Reserve Division* had been put under the *X. Reserve Corps* and ordered to advance south of Ploegsteert Wood. If the *11th Bavarian* and *22nd Reserve Divisions* were put at the disposal of the *Fourth Army* they would be employed with the *X. Reserve Corps*.

At 11.35 A.M. the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* reported that Messines had been captured; that the *7th Division* was attacking in the direction of Wyttschaete and Eikhof (2 miles N.N.E. of Wyttschaete) and the *17th Reserve Division* in the direction of Wyttschaete.

At 12.20 P.M. Ludendorff proposed to allot the *11th Bavarian Division* and the *22nd Reserve Division* to the *Fourth Army* should the latter require them to exploit to the full any success gained by the *X. Reserve Corps*. If they were not sufficient the *Alpine Corps* could also be placed at the Army's disposal.

At 3.40 P.M. the *22nd Reserve Division* was placed under the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* by the *Fourth Army*, and ordered to Comines. The corps, whose left boundary was the Douve, was to do its utmost to capture Wulverghem.

At 4.20 P.M. the *11th Bavarian Division* was allotted to the *X. Reserve Corps*.

At 4.45 P.M. Ludendorff warned Lossberg that the *22nd Reserve Division* should not be used north of Messines because the Armentières—Bailleul road must at all costs be reached before nightfall.

At 5.50 P.M. Ludendorff announced that Steenwerck had been captured by the *10th Ersatz Division* at 5.30 P.M. and that Erquinghem was also in German hands.

At 9.20 P.M. the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* reported to *Fourth Army* as follows :

The attack by the *7th Division* against Wytschaete had reached Oosttaerne.

The infantry of the *17th Reserve Division* had attacked at 6.30 P.M. but there was no further news. [It was to attack Wytschaete].

The *49th Reserve Division* was attacking towards Wulverghem and the movement would be continued after dark.

The task for the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* for the next day (11th) was to capture Wytschaete and push on towards Wulverghem, if it were not taken on the 10th. The subsequent task of the left flank of the corps—whether it should move towards Kemmel or Dranoutre—could only be decided after Wulverghem had fallen.

At 9.50 P.M. *X. Reserve Corps* reported to the *Fourth Army* as follows : The enemy falling back in front of the *31st Division* which was following him.

The *214th Division* reported heavy attacks against Ploegsteert by infantry and cavalry [*sic*] without artillery ; the division was holding the line Ploegsteert—Le Bizet.

The intention of the corps was to continue the attack on the 11th April, and by its orders issued at 12.30 A.M. (11th) : the boundary between the *7th Division* and *17th Reserve Division* was fixed ; the attack on Wulverghem was to be carried out by the reinforced left flank of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* ; the *22nd Reserve Division* was to be concentrated by 7 A.M. on the 11th in the area Bas Warneton—Comines.

Crown Prince Rupprecht desired that an attack on the Belgians should be made from Houthulst Forest as there were now only tired British divisions in the Ypres Salient, but the local commander replied that he required three divisions for the purpose.

CHAPTER XII

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

11TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLES OF ESTAIRES AND MESSINES (*concluded*)

(Map 17 ; Sketch 19)

Map 17. ON the 11th April, as on the previous day, there was a morning mist ; but it was a little thicker and lasted longer, until noon, not only interfering with air operations but adding to the difficulties of artillery co-operation. The Germans recommenced their attacks as early as 4.30 A.M., and it soon became evident that they felt themselves strong enough to essay the exploitation of the successes already won in the direction of Hazebrouck and Calais ; but, as Ludendorff puts it, " the result was not satisfactory ".¹

Sketch

19.

Against the 55th Division, to which since the night of the 9th/10th the 9th Bde (Br.-General H. C. Potter) of the 3rd Divn had been attached, four German divisions² again made no progress : " the *IV. Corps* was hung up as before, and " stuck in front of Givenchy and Festubert ",³ although Major-General Jeudwine had to extend his front to the left in order to release part of the 51st Divn for use farther north. The enemy shelling, which began very early, by 8 A.M. rose to a bombardment, and continued all day. To this, because of the mist, the British artillery could only reply by firing on the roads of approach and on likely areas of concentration.

Two main infantry attacks were made on the 55th Division, which at 3 A.M. had received five hundred reinforcements : one attack, at 10 A.M., gained as much as seven

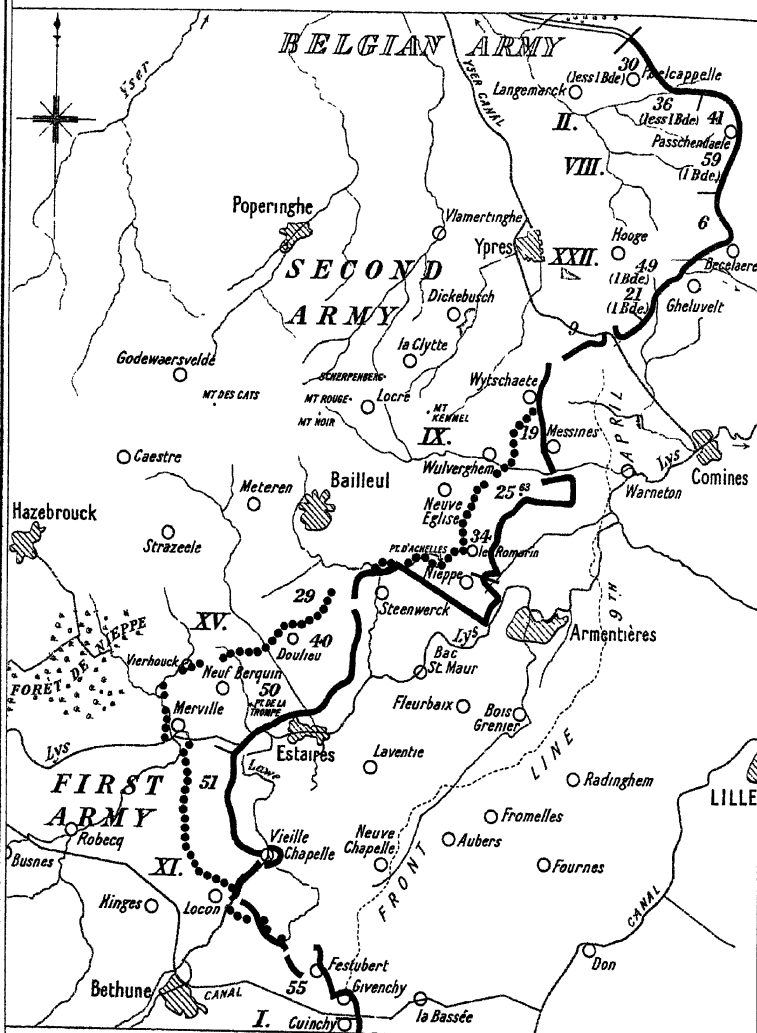
¹ Ludendorff ii., p. 607.

² *4th Ersatz*, *43rd Reserve*, *44th Reserve*, which had come into front line from support, and *18th Reserve*.

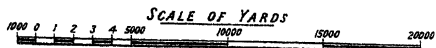
³ Schwarte iii., p. 442. Kuhl (p. 154) states that " the left wing " remained hung up in the B  thune area in front of Festubert and " Givenchy ".

Sketch 19.

THE LYS, 11TH APRIL.



REFERENCE
 Line 11th April. 12th April a.m.
 Army boundaries. Corps boundaries



hundred yards from the divisional engineers and pioneers holding the left defensive flank of the 166th Brigade (Br.-General R. J. Kentish); the other, about 4 P.M., was directed against the left of the 165th Brigade (Br.-General L.B. Boyd-Moss), and two strongpoints east of Festubert were lost. But a concentration against the right of the division was broken up by the fire of the 164th Brigade (Br.-General C. I. Stockwell), next on the south, and of the 11th Division (Major-General H. R. Davies), beyond the La Bassée canal.¹ In both cases the lost ground was regained by counter-attacks. With the 166th Brigade, there were employed a company each of the 1/4th S. Lancashire (Pioneers) and 1/Northumberland Fusiliers (9th Bde), the headquarter details and all other available men in the area, including R.E. and machine gunners; and in the 165th, parts of the 1/5th King's and 13/King's (9th Bde), on the initiative of Lieut.-Colonel A. Buckley, commanding the 1/5th King's. The enemy admitted his discomfiture by shelling the division all night.

Against the weak 51st Divn (Major-General G. T. C. Carter-Campbell, with headquarters at Robecq) now behind the Lawe—except for the bridgehead at Vieille Chapelle still held by a detachment of the 1/King Edward's Horse and 6/Gordon Highlanders—the infantry attack which had continued until midnight was renewed at 4.30 A.M. by four German divisions, the 16th and 8th from second line having reinforced the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* and *8th Bavarian Reserve Division*. The 152nd Bde, being in a very sharp salient with Vieille Chapelle at the apex, received close range machine-gun fire from all directions, and could contrive to put up but little cover in the marshy ground. By 5 A.M. the enemy had swept away the troops near the junction, north of the salient, of the 152nd and 153rd Bdes, and was trying to spread outwards. Vieille Chapelle, from which a last message was received at 7.45 A.M., held out, according to German accounts, "until the afternoon, every man of the garrison being killed, wounded or taken prisoner". The 154th Bde on the right, next to the 55th Division, with its position shortened, as already mentioned, by the 55th Division taking over a quarter of a mile of its front, was not attacked either so early or so heavily. From its left defensive flank, with the help of the divisional artillery, the brigade managed to inflict considerable loss by enfilade fire on the enemy

¹ The 11th Division had taken over part of the front of the 1st near the canal.

attacking the centre and left wing of the division. Nevertheless, as the flat ground behind the front was so swept by fire that little ammunition could be brought up, the British rifle fire began to slacken and the troops were slowly forced back, becoming ever weaker in numbers, especially in officers.¹ Gradually battalions disintegrated into a chain of small parties which it was almost impossible to control. Henceforward, in fact, during this entire battle—owing to losses and to the extension of front caused by the German thrust into an ever-enlarging re-entrant—the front line of the First Army, except where whole reinforcing divisions came up, continued to dwindle in density. It was often no more than a chain of small posts or single men sometimes twenty yards apart, and “fluid”, that is unstable, with parts of it continually shifting their positions. Entrenching, too, proved difficult work, as there was a shortage of spades, whilst digging was of little avail as water was found a foot below the surface.

The pressure of the enemy seemed to be mainly directed against the left, and the 51st Divn was only saved from complete disaster by the arrival early in the day of the leading troops of the 39th and 61st Divns. Of the former, two companies of the machine-gun battalion were followed by the remaining two which were sent to block the gap on the left near the Lawe until the arrival of infantry; of the latter there came up soon afterwards the 2/6th Royal Warwickshire and two of the three companies of the 1/5th Duke of Cornwall's L.I. (Pioneers).² These battalions, acting under instructions from the 51st Divn, took up a position covering Pacaut (2 miles west of Fosse) and extending a thousand yards to the north behind the junction of the 152nd and 153rd Bdes. They thus provided a support through which the troops of the 153rd Be,³ now numbering scarcely two hundred, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel L. M. Dyson, R.F.A. (in place of Br.-General A. T. Beckwith, who had become a casualty at 9 A.M.) could fall back, and under protection of which they would have an opportunity to reorganize.

This movement, completed between 11 A.M. and noon,

¹ The 51st Divn, scarcely reconstituted after the March fighting, had entered the battle with less than half of its establishment of officers.

² See page 196. Detraining at Steenbecque and Berguette (respectively 4 miles north-east and south-east of Aire, on the Lillers—Hazebrouck line), the units of the 61st Divn were put into buses and sent up piecemeal as they arrived.

³ A division or brigade which, has already been shown as “Divn” or “Bde”, will after further heavy casualties in the April battle be shown as “Dn” and “Be”.

was not carried out with the precision here set down, since the front of the two battalions of the 61st Divn had to be extended towards the left nearly three thousand yards farther, there being no other infantry available to support the machine guns of the 39th Divn. These by now had been reinforced on the left by a company of the 33rd Machine-Gun Battalion. In spite of the strength of all units having fallen so very low, the infantry of the 51st Dn, assisted by the fire of the divisional artillery and the attached XII. Australian Field Artillery Brigade, acting in close co-operation, steadfastly defended the various centres of resistance, L'Épinette, Paradis, and the buildings of Le Bouzateux Farm, thus greatly retarding the forward movement of the enemy. A useful flank facing south was formed along the Merville railway line, and from noon until late in the afternoon the fighting quieted down; but towards 4 p.m. the enemy again attacked, particularly both flanks of the 51st Dn and especially strongly from the north. Artillery fire dispersed his concentration opposite the right wing, but the left of the 154th Be was slightly forced in. Towards 6 p.m. the 1/5th Duke of Cornwall's L.I. (61st Divn), holding the left sector of the support line, its flank near the Lys being exposed by the thrust of the enemy against the 50th Divn, was also driven back. Its third company came up at this moment and took position on a little stream, known as the Ancienne Lys, just south of Merville, thus providing a support on which the battalion could re-form. Later on a part of the 153rd Be, reorganized and back in the centre of the line since 4.30 p.m.,¹ filled the gap which had arisen between the 1/5th Cornwall L.I. and the 2/6th R. Warwickshire holding the right of the original support line. Thus, whilst the 154th Be on the right next to the 55th Division had held fast around Locon, the 152nd Be and 153rd Be had been driven back about 2,500 yards, so that the left of the 51st Dn was now touching Merville. Taking into consideration the war-worn condition of the 51st Dn, and the five to six-fold numerical superiority of the enemy, the resistance it offered and the small amount of ground it lost were remarkable. The advantage of having a stable line of troops, however small, on which to retire and re-form hardly needs to be pointed out. On this

¹ The 153rd Be having lost all its officers, Lieut.-Colonel Dyson had called for four volunteers from the artillery. To play it back into action, Major-General Carter-Campbell sent up the divisional pipers and, thus encouraged, the brigade fought again as a unit until the 51st Dn was relieved.

day, the two leading battalions of the 61st Divn by their action both saved the 51st Dn from destruction and restored the situation.

The reinforcements allotted to the XI. Corps (headquarters, Robecq) were now well on the way. Following its two advanced battalions, the remainder of the 61st Divn (less artillery), under Major-General C. J. Mackenzie, after marches of five or six miles from its detraining stations, began to arrive during the night on the river Clarence between Robecq and Merville; the 182nd Bde came up at 9 P.M., and the 183rd in the early morning, when divisional headquarters were established, at Robecq. Forty-two Lewis guns manned by detachments of the 1st Tank Brigade were sent to cover their deployment, and reached St. Venant, two miles from the Clarence, at midnight. The 184th Bde, delayed by damage to the railway, did not begin to detrain until the early morning of the 12th; it was, however, in position on the Clarence before the German attack began on that day. The orders that the infantry of the 61st Divn, on reaching the Clarence, should relieve all troops of the 51st Dn east of it, up to L'EpINETTE, were, as it turned out, anticipated by events.

The 3rd Divn (less artillery and the 9th Bde, already with the 55th Division), which was with the I. Corps south of the La Bassée canal, was transferred at 9.30 A.M., by G.H.Q. orders, to the XI. Corps. Accordingly, during the afternoon of the 11th, the 8th Bde concentrated just south, and the 76th just north-west, of Hinges, that is near the junction of the 55th Division and 51st Dn. By 11 P.M. three battalions of these brigades had been moved up into second line to hold the Hamel Switch and the canal passage near it.¹ At 1.30 A.M. on the 12th, the 3rd Divn received orders to relieve the 154th Be without delay; but the motor-cyclist carrying the order to the 8th Bde fell into a shell-hole, and it was not until 6.30 A.M. that the 2/Royal Scots and 1/R. Scots Fusiliers from the Hamel Switch had taken the place of the 154th Be, also, by a fortunate misunderstanding, extending some thousand yards farther north so as to gain touch with the 152nd Be. Their place in the Hamel Switch was filled by other battalions of the 8th and 76th Bdes.

The 5th Division, the third division sent to the XI.

¹ The Hamel Switch, facing north about 800 yards south of Locon, ran from the Aire canal to the Lawe.

Corps, was delayed by damage done to the railway near Amiens by German long-range guns, which actually dropped some shells near the trains ; it did not detrain at Aire and Thiennes (8 miles N.N.E. of Aire), eight miles behind the battle front at the junction of the XI. and XV. Corps, until the night of the 11th/12th.

In the XI. Corps, when the 51st Dn was forced back by the enemy offensive towards Hazebrouck it had pivoted on its right ; but in the XV. Corps,¹ the formations next on the north—that is to say, the 50th Divn,² and the two composite brigade-battalions, engineers and pioneers now representing the 40th Dn, with the 86th and 87th Brigades of the 29th Division supporting them—had pivoted on their left, that is on the 74th Bde, near Steenwerck. As the Germans pressed on the operations against the two corps resembled, as it were, the gradual forcing of locked folding doors the hinges of which held fast. In the process, the main pressure being along the northern bank of the Lys and astride the Estaires—Berquins road, the northern half of the door, represented by the right of the XV. Corps, was badly damaged, exhibiting many large cracks and gaps ; but it still held.

After an irregular bombardment in the mist with field artillery, a general attack with heavy masses of troops preceded by small parties was made by three German divisions, *35th*, *42nd* and *81st Reserve*, against the front of the three brigades of the 50th Divn, which was very weak although 550 reinforcements had arrived that morning.³ The 151st Bde was astride the Lys, west of La Gorgue, while the line of the 149th and 150th—which had bivouacked for the night on the open ground—ran through meadows a mile or more from the river, behind Estaires, and so northward to rejoin the 40th Dn west of Steenwerck. Behind the 150th Bde were concentrated two brigades of the 29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley, whose headquarters were, after 4 P.M., at La Motte), the 87th and the 86th, the latter in reserve. Three miles behind these again were the

¹ Headquarters at La Motte, 4½ miles north-west of Merville, until 5 P.M., then at Wardrecques, 9 miles farther west.

² Headquarters at Merville, and later at Norrent Fontes, 3 miles N.N.W. of Lillers.

³ A German (Alsatian) deserter having stated that the troops in Estaires, after looting the estaminets and wine-shops, were out of hand and that the Grande and Petite Places and streets adjoining were littered with soldiers sleeping off their carouse, artillery fire was turned on to that town.

92nd and 93rd Bdes, of the 31st Divn (Major-General R. J. Bridgford), each with a field company R.E. and a field ambulance, and the 31st Machine-Gun Battalion. These troops had been brought by bus from around Villers Chatel (10 miles north-west of Arras) where the division was reorganizing, and had concentrated during the night of the 10th/11th near Outtersteene (6 miles east of Hazebrouck); there, in view of the uncertainty of the situation, they had thrown out an outpost line.¹

By 7 A.M. the enemy had effected a lodgment in some houses at Trou Bayard, the point of junction of the 149th and 150th Bdes, but was unable to capture the whole village. Shortly after 8 A.M. the left battalion of the 150th was very heavily engaged by large masses. By 9 A.M. it was forced to retire, followed soon after by the centre battalion, and both fell back about a thousand yards on the 87th Brigade. On the right, however, the 4/East Yorkshire, with the help of the 149th Bde and officers' patrols sent up by the 87th Brigade, which at once became involved in the fighting, was able to hold on and inflict many casualties on the assailants. Local counter-attacks were attempted at many places, but the young soldiers in the ranks were too inexperienced for this kind of manœuvre, not understanding that advances must be covered by fire. Divisional orders were then issued for the 87th Brigade to counter-attack so as to relieve the 150th Bde; but before these arrived, the 87th Brigade, owing to the retirement of the centre and left of the 150th Bde, was already in the front line. By this time the left of the 51st Dn south of the Lys was also retiring and the right of the 151st Bde moved back in order to keep touch. To complete the difficulties of the 50th Divn, the Germans, about 9.30 A.M., after shelling divisional headquarters in Merville—when Major-General H. C. Jackson sent back all his staff except his G.S.O.'s—launched a serious attack against the junction of the 151st and 149th Bdes astride the Estaires—Berquins road. The 5/Durham L.I. (north of the Lys), very weak after its losses in the street fighting in Estaires on the previous day, was unable to withstand the weight of the German attack, and so, with the XV. Corps Reinforcement Battalion recently sent up, fell back slowly towards Merville. The right of the 149th Bde was consequently

¹ The buses for the third brigade, the 4th Guards Bde, were delayed by the heavy traffic on the roads. It had spent the night at the embussing points about Tinquies—Chelers (12 miles N.N.W. of Arras); and then did not start until 1.30 P.M. on the 11th, arriving at Strazeele, in rear of the 92nd and 93rd Bdes, about 9 P.M.

exposed, so Br.-General Riddell brought up his reserve battalion in an attempt to fill the gap.

At 10.15 A.M. Major-General Jackson directed the 150th Bde, under cover of the 87th Brigade, to concentrate at Pont de la Trompe on the Estaires—Neuf Berquin road, astride which the C.R.E. of the 50th Divn (Lieut.-Colonel J. A. McQueen) was organizing a line with two of his own field companies and two of the 29th Division; this line had been selected by the divisional commander on flat, open ground. Br.-General Rees did not receive the order to march to Pont de la Trompe until 11.30 A.M., and he decided first to collect his units at Douliou, behind his position, and then move south.

Meantime the 87th Brigade had been reinforced on the right by the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers, in the centre by a company of the 2/Royal Fusiliers, and on the left by the 1/R. Guernsey L.I., all of the 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape), the Guernseymen filling a gap of sixteen hundred yards between the 87th Brigade and 40th Dn. The two brigades managed to keep the enemy back, but at the cost of very severe losses.¹ Their right was still secure, as the 149th Bde and 4/East Yorkshire (150th) were maintaining their position near Trou Bayard, but the two brigade-battalions of the 40th Dn, on the left, were gradually falling back on Douliou, two miles in rear of their original front, reaching it between 2 and 3 P.M. The 151st Bde, on the right, when its left battalion (5/Durham L.I.) north of the Lys was pushed back, managed only with difficulty, with the assistance of a XV. Corps composite battalion, to withdraw its other two battalions across the river; indeed, the last two companies remained on the south bank until touch with the 51st Dn was lost. After fighting a continuous rear-guard action, by 3 P.M., the brigade occupied a line near Chapelle Duvelle (3,000 yards east of Merville), running towards Pont de la Trompe, which place the 5/Durham L.I. had reached an hour earlier. By 3 P.M., moreover, enemy low-flying aircraft had located the position of the 149th, and directed artillery fire on it, so that a general retirement became inevitable. The brigade (now, after 58 hours' fighting, only 400 strong) and the survivors of the 4/East Yorkshire (150th) passed through the thin line of the 87th Brigade—which, by Br.-General G. H. N.

¹ Before 2 P.M. two companies of the 1/Guernsey L.I. were annihilated, while the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers had lost 9 out of 11 officers and 300 other ranks, the 1/K.O.S.B., the greater part of three companies. The 2/South Wales Borderers, as will be seen, was reduced to less than a score of men.

Jackson's order, had prolonged its right a thousand yards to the Meteren Becque—and managed to struggle back to the Pont de la Trompe position.

In the course of the afternoon, therefore, both flanks of the 87th and 86th Brigades were not only exposed, but the enemy was also in rear of the left defensive flank, while the 2/South Wales Borderers was nearly annihilated, only one officer and 15 other ranks escaping. A general retirement, marked by confused and heavy fighting, ensued, until at 4.30 P.M. Major-General Cayley gave orders for the two brigades to re-form on a line running from Pont de la Trompe—where it was hoped to regain touch with the 50th Dn—in a general north-easterly direction to Douliou. Towards the Pont de la Trompe line considerable bodies of the enemy were already advancing, covered by skirmishers, astride the Berquin road; but, on receiving fire, they paused. About 5.30 P.M., however, some of their field guns having come up, they shelled the defenders out of each post near the road in the Pont de la Trompe position in succession, and broke in. The 151st Be, further weakened by the necessity of detailing two companies to prevent the Germans crossing the Lys on its right flank, was pressed westwards towards Merville, while the 149th Be and 87th Brigade were driven northwards away from Pont de la Trompe. Thus, as the 86th Brigade was withdrawing westwards on Douliou, the men of the 86th and 87th Brigades became somewhat intermixed.

By 7 P.M. there was considerable doubt where the front line lay. It was thought to be entirely north of the Meteren Becque, leaving a gap of nearly two miles; but it was established, by a personal reconnaissance made by Lieut.-Colonel J. Forbes-Robertson, commanding the 1/Border Regiment, and reported at 8.45 P.M. to Br.-General Jackson (87th Brigade), that the right lay two thousand yards east of Neuf Berquin—thus leaving a gap of some two thousand yards near the village.¹ From that point the line ran north-eastwards across the Meteren Becque and then due north, passing east of Douliou, where there were troops of the 31st Divn.² It was obvious that the line required readjustment, and on the left a pivot for this movement was available.

During the morning, the 92nd Bde (Br.-General O. de L.

¹ For his gallantry and powers of leadership on 11th April and subsequent occasions, Lieut.-Colonel J. Forbes-Robertson, D.S.O., M.C., was awarded the V.C.

² The artillery did not accompany the infantry and engineers of the 31st Divn when they were embussed and entrained.

Williams) had moved up in support of the 40th Dn, and had established a line behind Doulieu and northwards, covering about three thousand yards of front. The only information received by Br.-General Williams made it clear to him that the situation was confused and the position of the first line very vague. The 93rd Bde (Br.-General S. G. Taylor) was to join him as support ; but at 12.30 P.M., as it was about to move forward from Outtersteene, patrols brought in a report, subsequently confirmed, that the enemy was in force at La Becque (nearly 2 miles west of Steenwerck), thus showing that the weak line of the 40th Dn—men extended at 20 paces' intervals—had been driven back, if not penetrated. Major-General R. J. Bridgford (31st Divn), therefore, cancelled the orders of the 93rd Bde, and directed it, with one and a half companies of the 31st Machine-Gun Battalion, to move forward and drive the enemy from La Becque. Since only one 18-pdr. battery was available, it was decided to dispense with artillery preparation, and deliver the attack more or less as a surprise.

This counter-attack was made at 7 P.M. in the dusk, this time having been fixed by the battalion commanders as the earliest possible hour. It proved entirely successful, even going beyond the objectives, indeed regaining the line held by the 40th Dn, and re-establishing touch on the right with the elements of the 40th Dn which remained, and on the left with the 74th Bde. The 92nd Bde, which, in view of the situation to the south, had formed a right defensive flank behind Doulieu, now threw forward its left to connect with the 93rd. In accordance with orders issued by the XV. Corps four hours earlier, it also formally relieved the 40th Dn (less the 121st Be with the 34th Divn), which then marched back to Strazeele. It was subsequently discovered that the left of the 93rd Bde was not in touch with the front line of the 74th, so at 1.30 A.M. its last battalion (15/West Yorkshire) was sent up to fill the gap, but it actually took position half a mile behind the right wing of the 74th.

Finding that the 92nd and 93rd Bdes were thus firmly established on the left, partly behind Doulieu, whilst on the right, the Germans had reached Neuf Berquin beyond that flank, the commanders of the 86th, 87th Brigades and 149th Be (Br.-Generals Cheape, Jackson and Riddell) about 9 P.M. decided to swing back the right about a mile and a half, so as to interpose between Neuf and Vieux Berquin. The movement was to pivot on the 92nd Bde behind Doulieu, and the right flank to reach as far as Vierhouck, about

twelve hundred yards west of the Neuf Berquin—Vieux Berquin road. The sector between Vierhouck and the road was to be held by the 149th Be (reinforced by grooms, cooks and light-duty men), and the rest of the line divided between the 86th and 87th Brigades. After roads had been allotted and reconnoitred the withdrawal was begun at 1.30 A.M. on the 12th under cover of a noisy demonstration, and completed by dawn.

Br.-General Riddell (149th Be), whose troops had to cross the road between Neuf and Vieux Berquin, managed by a surprise attack to secure some houses at the northern end of Neuf Berquin, and by this manoeuvre succeeded in reaching his position without many casualties. But, owing to its losses, the 87th Brigade could not extend to the Berquin road, so that a gap of nearly a thousand yards extended between it and the 149th Be. A composite battalion of stragglers and leave men, now attached to the 149th Be, was detailed to fill it, but being scattered in small groups the men could not be collected; so the gap remained open. It was, however, covered in rear by the 12/K.O.Y.L.I. (pioneers of the 31st Divn) and, until they were required for work elsewhere, by the 210th, 211th and 223rd Field Companies R.E.

When Major-General Jackson, about 4 P.M., learnt that the 149th and 151st Bes were again being attacked, so that Merville appeared to be threatened from the east and north-east, as well as from south of the Lys, he made arrangements to block the roads leading to Merville, and then reported the situation by telephone to the XV. Corps, enquiring what he should endeavour to do. In reply, he was informed that his duty was, first, to cover Merville and, secondly, to maintain touch with the 29th Division. A divisional order was therefore issued at 4.40 P.M. directing that the Pont de la Trompe line should be held as far as the Berquins road, whence it would be continued by the 29th Division; and that all units and stragglers who could be found should be directed to this line.

Before this order reached the brigades the German attack had developed and the line had been lost. The battalions of the 151st Be, threatened from both flanks, fell back to a shorter line covering Merville, but they were not sufficient in numbers to extend to the river. Troops of the 51st Dn tried to fill the gap,¹ but in vain, and the Germans

¹ The 1/5th Cornwall L.I. (pioneers of the 61st Divn), attached to the 51st. See page 225.

began to enter the northern part of Merville about 7.30 P.M. After some house-to-house fighting, in which the engineer companies employed on demolitions of the bridges took part, the 151st Be, by divisional order, fell back behind a stream which runs into the Lys along the western edge of Merville. The parties holding the bridges on the Lys were also withdrawn, and the bridges were blown up by the 446th Field Company R.E., the last being fired at midnight as Germans were actually crossing it; but the demolition of the railway bridge south-west of the town had to be left incomplete.

The parties representing the 150th Be, the third brigade of the 50th Dn, had left Doulieu at 4.30 P.M., making for the Pont de la Trompe. After rallying some of the troops retiring from the Pont de la Trompe position, the situation of this isolated and very weak brigade, now ordered to march to Vierhouck, appeared to Br.-General Rees to be desperate. Fortunately, the enemy's attack began to slacken all along the line, and, helped by the field artillery, which was still in action near Vierhouck, the 150th crossed the Berquin road under machine-gun fire and reached its destination, the last battalion coming in at 10.30 P.M. The brigade was then put into the line south of Vierhouck, so that the 50th Dn had extended from right to left the 151st, 150th, 149th Bes as a line of scattered posts more than three miles long, from the Lys, now the boundary with the 51st Dn, west of Merville, past Vierhouck, to the road between Neuf and Vieux Berquin.

Some help for the 50th Dn at length appeared. The 4th Guards Bde (Br.-General Hon. L. J. P. Butler) of the 31st Divn, delayed on the road after the 92nd and 93rd Bdes had left, had only debussed and gone into bivouac at Strazeele (3½ miles north of Vieux Berquin) at 9.30 P.M. An hour later the XV. Corps instructed the 31st Divn that the brigade should be aroused and used to restore the situation between Merville and the Berquins road and to cover Hazebrouck, though not to regain Merville, as first proposed.¹ At 2.30 A.M. on the 12th, two battalions moved forward and, without interference—except that a company of the Irish Guards, sent down the Neuf Berquin road to cover deployment, was fired at—took position behind the covering

¹ On this occasion, Lieut.-General Sir J. Du Cane said to the C.R.A. of the 31st Divn, who came to see him, "the situation on my corps front "would be quite O.K. if only I could induce anyone to stand still instead "of retiring".

company of the 149th Be, with its left on the Berquins road, and its right extending past the gap between the 149th and 150th Bes. Thus, by the morning of the 12th, the 81st Divn, in two portions, was covering in all about five and a half miles.

The 74th Bde and the 88th Brigade (with the 1/2nd Monmouthshire, pioneers, attached) on its left maintained their positions and formed the pivot of the movement of the XV. Corps on this day. At dawn the 74th was disposed north of the two brigade-battalions of the 40th Dn in a concave line round the west and north sides of Steenwerck. It had in the line the 9/L. North Lancashire, the three field companies R.E. (231st, 224th and 229th) of the 40th Dn, the 1/5th York & Lancaster (attached from the 148th Brigade, 49th Division), 3/Worcestershire and 11/Lancashire Fusiliers, with only the 497th Field Company R.E. in support and reserve. In order to shorten the line, at 7.55 A.M., Br.-General Craigie Halkett gave orders for an advance in the mist which would place his troops on the chord of the arc formed by his night position. This bold step of attacking no doubt impressed the enemy, and may well have been the cause of the 74th Bde and the troops with it not being hustled back on the 11th. The advance was begun in the mist at 9.30 A.M. by the three battalions on the left, and, in spite of opposition, they reached the assigned line and even the outskirts of Steenwerck. But, by midday, the fire directed against the Worcestershire and the Lancashire Fusiliers was so heavy and the pressure on the left flank so great, that these troops withdrew slightly behind the position they had gained, the York & Lancaster holding on until about 4 P.M., when it also retired. Meanwhile, owing to the attack made on the two brigade-battalions of the 40th Dn, the 9/L. North Lancashire of the 74th and the R.E. with it had been obliged to swing back to form a defensive flank and keep touch with the 40th Dn; also with the 93rd Bde when it came up later with the last remaining sections of the three engineer field companies.

Just before 7 P.M. Br.-General Craigie Halkett received notice from the 40th Dn of the impending relief of that division and of his brigade by the 92nd and 93rd Bdes, which was to take effect as soon as the 93rd Bde had made its counter-attack. After guarding the left flank of this movement, what remained of the L. North Lancashire and the engineers was withdrawn into reserve, when the 93rd Bde reached its objective, but the rest of the 74th Bde was not relieved,

and remained in position. During the night, owing to reorganization, touch between the 98rd and 74th Bdes was lost, and in the morning mist the former, as we have seen, extended to the left, actually, as it turned out, behind the 74th.

On the left of the 74th Bde, the point of contact being Steenwerck station, the 34th Divn (Major-General C. L. Nicholson)¹ and its three attached brigades (88th, 121st and 147th), in the Nieppe salient, were in a position dangerous in itself, but would be left isolated if on either side of it the divisions against which the main enemy attack had so far been directed, should be driven back. The 88th Brigade (which passed from the command of the 25th Divn to that of the 34th at 11 A.M.), the 101st Bde (with the 18/Northumberland Fusiliers, pioneers, attached) and the 103rd Bde (with one battalion in support) were extended on a three-mile line along the Bailleul—Armentières railway, with a parallel support line on the Bailleul—Armentières road. The 102nd Bde held the blunted apex of the salient, with a 2,000-yard front along the Lys from Pont de Nieppe to the junction with the 75th Bde (Second Army), with a support line in the Nieppe Switch. The 147th Bde (Br.-General C. G. Lewes) was in Nieppe, and the 121st Be (now only a composite battalion) a mile behind it in reserve.

At 1.45 A.M., before his troops had quite reached the above position, Major-General Nicholson was warned by the XV. Corps that another heavy attack was expected against the IX. Corps on his left, and that in case of a forced retirement the line to be occupied should run from Steenwerck (not yet known to be in German hands) north-eastwards through Neuve Eglise and Wytschaete to Hollebeke. This withdrawal would take the 34th Divn out of the Nieppe salient, and the 7th Bde (Second Army) from the equally dangerous St. Yves salient, north of Ploegsteert Wood.

Soon after 5.30 A.M. the Germans (inner wings of the *117th* and *38th Divisions*) attacked the 103rd and 102nd Bdes in the head of the salient. Machine-gun fire seemed to come from every direction, but the main pressure was north-westwards along the direction of the railway. After the first advance, the weight of the attack was always against the apex of the salient, no assault being made on the long right flank which followed the railway. It may therefore be assumed that this offensive was a holding attack designed

¹ Headquarters at Outtersteene until 9 P.M., then Le Grand Hasard, just south of Hazebrouck.

to detain the 34th Divn in the salient whilst the movements on either side took effect. Penetration was effected only into the houses around Pont de Nieppe; but the enemy then spreading outwards, the 102nd Bde fell back to the support line, the Nieppe Switch. Elsewhere the front was maintained, although many reports came to hand to the effect that there had been a break-through on the railway. One attempt, indeed, had actually succeeded, but the Germans who broke through were driven off by two platoons of the 1/4th Duke of Wellington's and a party of two hundred stragglers collected by the staff of the 147th Bde.

In view of the attack which was now beginning to develop against the IX. Corps, detachments both of the 88th Brigade and 147th Bde were pushed out to guard the left flank. Later, about 2 p.m., the 121st Be (with two companies of the 103rd Bde and the pioneer battalion) was ordered to move from Pont d'Achelles (about three-quarters of a mile north-west of Nieppe) north-eastward against Le Romarin (nearly 2 miles north-east of Pont de Nieppe). In conjunction with the 75th Bde, which provided one battalion on the left, the 121st was to drive off the Germans who, having penetrated the front of the 75th Bde, had reached Le Romarin, thus threatening the rear of the 34th Divn. Some buildings half-way to the objective were reached and captured; but, as the opposition offered by machine guns and snipers was considerable, and a withdrawal of the division imminent, Major-General Nicholson ordered that the advance should not be pressed. The left flank was sufficiently guarded to cover a retirement since a detachment of the 88th Brigade was holding a line, which had been reached without fighting, from the outskirts of Nieppe northwards towards the 121st Be; while the 147th Bde was in a continuation of the Nieppe Switch behind the left front. The greater part of the remaining divisional engineers, except the 209th Field Company R.E. which was kept with the 103rd Bde, were sent to the reserve line, extending south-west from Bailleul, to cover divisional headquarters, as well as to assemble and sort out stragglers, of whom four hundred were soon collected.

Fighting continued without cessation on the fronts of the 103rd and 102nd Bdes, with shell fire and sniping elsewhere. In view of the danger from the IX. Corps area, Major-General Nicholson, after communicating with the XV. Corps, sent a staff officer to Br.-General Gore, the senior infantry brigadier on the spot, who reached the 101st Bde

headquarters at 4.30 P.M., to instruct him to prepare and carry out a retirement towards Steenwerck station, but in no case farther. The 101st and 103rd Bdes were to move along the railway, the 147th and 102nd along the Bailleul road, whilst the 88th Brigade covered the withdrawal. A conference of the five brigadiers was immediately held on the Bailleul road north-east of Steenwerck station, with enemy parties quite close. It was decided to begin the retirement at 7.30 P.M.: the 147th Bde, drawn up in two lines across the Nieppe road, with the 1/East Lancashire (103rd Bde) across the railway, under Br.-General C. G. Lewes, was to cover the first stage of the retirement, the forward troops passing through it, and the 7/Duke of Wellington's finally to form the rear guard. The operation was not carried out undisturbed; for it was still light, and the enemy, suspecting a withdrawal, barraged the railway heavily, and fired down it with machine guns, so that the 101st and 103rd Bdes had to move across country. The rear guard remained in position until 1 A.M., and by dawn the 88th Brigade, nearly in its old position, and the 102nd Bde, with three engineer companies filling gaps, were holding a W-shaped front from Steenwerck station to Pont d'Achelles, in touch on either side with the neighbouring divisions and with the 101st, 103rd and 147th Bdes behind them. All the guns covering Major-General Nicholson's command were got away without loss.¹

By Army orders, the heavy guns of the XV. Corps should have been sent back, but the 60-pdrs. and 6-inch howitzers were retained and did good service, sometimes even standing alongside the field artillery; in particular they shelled roads and cover. Some of the field guns remained behind when retirement was necessary, fighting in the actual line of the last infantry. Of gun ammunition there was plenty, as there were many dumps; one officer

¹ The 38th Division artillery (which was supporting the 34th Divn in the absence of its own artillery) received a message of congratulation from Major-General Nicholson (34th Divn), dated 23rd April 1918. In this he wrote: "The successive retirements which had to be made were most skilfully and rapidly carried out in such a manner that at no time was the retiring infantry without the covering fire of at least one group. No guns were lost except two field howitzers in a forward position at Le Vesse, which were destroyed by hostile fire on the 9th April." There were originally 35 guns in the Armentières salient, distributed by single guns and sections, and some came under machine-gun fire; but all the batteries, after a preliminary retirement east of the Lys, were withdrawn at noon on the 10th, first across the Lys, and later to positions between Steenwerck and Neuve Eglise.

reported that he was drawing it from the front instead of from the rear. Similar use could not be made of the engineer dumps, which were destroyed by special parties. The medical situation was much eased by hospital trains coming up not only to Hazebrouck, but to Outtersteene station, only three miles behind the front line, to which the wounded were conveyed by motor vehicles. The main difficulty in the way of evacuation of the wounded was the constant shelling during the afternoon of the hospital buildings in Merville, over which the Red Cross flag was flying.

Map 17,
Sketch
19.

In the IX. Corps (advanced headquarters in a hutted camp on Mont Noir, now in full view of the enemy), six German divisions¹ from 5.45 A.M. onwards made strenuous efforts all day, from the Army boundary north of Nieppe to the Ypres—Comines canal,² to advance against the front held by the nine weak brigades, including reserves, of the 25th, 19th and 9th Divns (divisional headquarters at Ravelsburg Camp, Dranoutre and the Scherpenberg, respectively).

The 75th Bde (Br.-General C. C. Hannay), on the right, had attached to it the divisional engineers, the pioneer battalion (6/S. Wales Borderers), and the machine-gun battalion, with the 9/Cheshire of the 56th Bde.³ All of these and its own three battalions were in the line, without reserves. The brigade and its attached troops covered a front of nearly three miles from the low ground near the Lys, behind Ploegsteert village (in enemy hands) up to Hill 63, an outlying feature of Messines Ridge, separated from it by the shallow valley of the Douve. In the fighting which lasted until after 7 A.M. the assailants were repulsed by rifle and machine-gun fire with heavy losses. A pause then followed during which German aeroplanes flew low over the line to locate it, one being shot down.

Two hours later Germans were observed to be assembling in and to the south of Ploegsteert. Another heavy attack

¹ The 36th Reserve and 49th Reserve came into the front line to reinforce the 214th, 31st, 17th Reserve and 7th; these six divisions, with the 83rd, 11th Bavarian and 22nd Reserve, formed the X. Reserve and XVIII. Reserve Corps.

² The boundary between the First and Second Armies nearly coincided with that between the German Sixth and Fourth Armies.

³ As the 1/4th K.S.L.I. was with the 7th Bde and the 8/North Staffordshire with the 57th Bde, the command of the 56th Bde was reduced to a trench-mortar battery.

was launched at 10.15 A.M., which eventually broke through the right centre of the 75th Bde, getting as far as Le Romarin and enfilading the defence lines on either side. By 2 P.M. the enemy had separated the 75th Bde into two parts, the two battalions on the right being a thousand yards back in the Nieppe Switch, in touch with the 34th Divn, with their left near Le Romarin, and the rest of the brigade command N.N.W. of that place in a trench called "Leinster Road", behind the Army (Green) Line.¹

In order to recapture Le Romarin, Br.-General Hannay detailed the divisional engineers and the pioneer battalion to act in conjunction with the troops of the 34th Divn about 2 P.M., as already mentioned. As a result small parties gained a foothold in the village, and a machine gun which had given much trouble was captured by a special patrol at the second attempt. But the engineers and pioneers were unable to gain complete possession of the place, and a renewal of the attack at 4 P.M. brought no further success.

Meantime, the position of the 9/Cheshire and 8/Border Regiment on the right in the Nieppe Switch, next the 34th Divn, was becoming intolerable owing to shell fire, in particular that which came at close range from a field gun in enfilade. About 6 P.M., Br.-General Hannay learnt from the 25th Divn of the probable retirement of the 34th Divn at 7.30 P.M., of which move the XV. Corps had given the IX. Corps notice at 5.20 P.M.; he was instructed that in such an event he must conform and retire to the line Pont d'Achelles (on the Bailleul road, 4,000 yards north-west of the Pont de Nieppe, the left flank of the 34th Divn)—Le Romarin, whence the Army (Green) Line was to be held. But, as the enemy was in Le Romarin, the line eventually occupied lay two hundred yards to the west. The retirement of the 9/Cheshire and 8/Border Regiment, on the right, was only begun at 8.30 P.M., when darkness gave concealment, for the enemy machine-gunners were very much on the alert. The left wing remained in Leinster Road, connecting, on the left, to the Army (Green) Line.

As a tactical measure, the retirement of the 34th Divn (First Army) and the 75th Bde (Second Army) from the Nieppe salient was really inevitable in view of the enemy pressure on either side. But, as no reserve was available behind the salient, and no steps had been taken to ensure

¹ The German *Fourth Army* Diary states, p. 56, that the British position of Le Romarin was not burst through until the evening.

co-operation of the forces at the junction of the First and Second Armies, the 75th Bde might well have been placed under Major-General Nicholson for the purpose.

On the left of the 75th Bde, the fighting of the 10th April had left the 7th Bde (Br.-General C. J. Griffin) of the 25th Divn in a pronounced salient at St. Yves, which presented a two-mile face to the south along the northern edge of Ploegsteert Wood as far as Hill 63, whose broad flat top afforded good observation. This face was held from west to east by the 1/4th K.S.L.I. (56th Bde, 19th Divn) and three companies of the 10/Cheshire; the 1/Wiltshire and 4/South Staffordshire, now very weak after the previous day's fight, were on a 2,000-yard front along the blunt apex of the salient, while the fourth company of the 10/Cheshire occupied its short northern face along the Douve.

The early morning passed in comparative quiet, except that low-flying aeroplanes by bombing and machine gunning succeeded in inflicting losses on German infantry pushing forward against the salient. But, after the second attack against the 75th Bde at 10.15 A.M. had driven it back to Leinster Road, the enemy advanced into the wide gap thus opened, and by 11.30 A.M. was firing at Hill 63 with machine guns from the south and south-west. The threat to the right wing of the 7th Bde caused by the retirement of the 75th led Lieut.-General Sir A. Gordon (IX. Corps), about the same time, to place one of the two battalions of the 148th Brigade, which were in reserve behind Neuve Eglise, at the disposal of the 25th Divn; the 1/4th York & Lancaster was detailed and sent forward to the right of the 7th Bde.¹ As no assistance could arrive for two or three hours, at 12.30 P.M., Br.-General Griffin ordered the retirement of the brigade. This order was sent by telephone to the "Catacombs", an immense series of dug-outs in Hill 63 then housing the battalion headquarters of the 1/Wiltshire and 10/Cheshire.² It so happened that the commanding officer of the 4/South Staffordshire had just come there in search of information; so, after further conversation on the telephone, it was settled at this conference of the three battalion commanders that the retirement should begin at 5 P.M.

¹ One battalion, the 1/5th York & Lancaster, had been sent on the previous evening to the 74th Bde. The third battalion of the 148th Brigade was moved up to the Army (Green) Line in front of Neuve Eglise.

² These dug-outs had been made by Australian tunnellers and could accommodate two battalions in the bowels of the hill.

In the meantime, on the right wing of the brigade, the 1/4th K.S.L.I. at Hill 63 stoutly maintained its own, and had even made a successful counter-attack into the gap on its right. The centre of the brigade as well as its left on the Douve had also not been seriously pressed. At 1.33 p.m., however, a reconnoitring aeroplane dropped a message at 25th Divn headquarters indicating that the Germans were massed four-deep around the forward part of the 7th Bde salient. This information and the knowledge that the 7th Bde was very weak with its right flank in the air caused Major-General Bainbridge (25th Divn) to order it to fall back through the Army (Green) Line to a position west of Neuve Eglise, that is over three miles ; but strong outposts were to remain in the present position until forced to retire, as it was important to keep the Germans from using St. Yves as an artillery observatory. When compelled to withdraw these outposts were to "fight their way back". This order was telephoned on to the Catacombs about 3 p.m. By this time the 1/4th York & Lancaster (148th Brigade) had arrived on the scene, where, after making a successful attack, it had established itself on the right of the 1/4th K.S.L.I., though without entirely closing the large gap between the 75th and 7th Bdes.

The two commanding officers still in the Catacombs, together with the commander of the 4/S. Staffordshire who had just left but was called back, aware of the weakness of their own battalions, understood the 25th Divn order to mean that they were to hold on to the very end, and then fight a rear-guard action back over Hill 63. Immediate steps were taken to cancel the orders already issued for the 5 p.m. retirement, and new orders were prepared for a prolonged defence. It was decided to shorten the line by abandoning the forward part of the St. Yves salient ; but, in view of the heavy fire coming from all directions, to postpone all movement until 8.30 p.m. It was by now 5.30 p.m., half an hour after the time originally selected for retirement ; a message showed that the St. Yves salient was nearly enveloped, and Germans could be seen advancing against the long southern flank and Hill 63. The Catacombs were soon surrounded, and the three battalion commanders captured. The remnants of the brigade, with the 1/4th K.S.L.I. (56th Bde) and the 1/4th York & Lancaster (148th Brigade), then actually fought their way back as best they could to Neuve Eglise, some parties passing through the German lines. The losses incurred thereby were severe,

the 1/Wiltshire being reduced to seventy of all ranks. Interference by divisional headquarters with the men on the spot had brought about an unnecessary disaster.

Some small support, however, for the two harried brigades (75th and 7th) of the 25th Divn was fortunately available. The 33rd Division (less artillery) had been moving by train during the night of the 10th/11th April from the First Army to join the IX. Corps, and had detrained at Caestre and Strazeele (10½ and 9 miles west of Neuve Eglise). At 1 P.M. the 100th Brigade Group,¹ then on the march for Ravelsberg Camp (2 miles west of Neuve Eglise, and 25th Divn headquarters), was placed at the disposal of Major-General Bainbridge, and two battalions were ordered to the Army (Green) Line east of Neuve Eglise, where, in the dark, they took their place between the 2/South Lancashire (75th Bde) and the 1/4th K.O.Y.L.I. (the reserve battalion of the 148th Brigade). Orders had been issued for the renewed concentration of the 148th Brigade; but the 1/5th York & Lancaster was not recovered from the 74th Bde, and remained west of Steenwerck.

The 98th Brigade Group (33rd Division) had halted at 6 P.M. at Ravelsberg Camp; but, at 2 A.M. on the 12th, was ordered to move at daylight 2½ miles north to Dranoutre, as reserve of the 19th Divn. The 19th Brigade Group, the third portion of the 33rd Division, did not reach Meteren (west of Bailleul and 6 miles west of Neuve Eglise) until after 10 P.M., and there it spent the night.

North of the Douve, the 19th and the 9th Divns² had a successful day; against two German divisions,³ they easily maintained their positions, including Wytschaete, until towards night, when they were moved back, pivoting on Wytschaete, in order to keep touch with the divisions to the south.

Except for shelling and sniping, the troops of the three

¹ 100th Brigade with a field company R.E., machine-gun company and a field ambulance.

² Under the 19th Divn were: the 57th Bde, with the S. African Bde and a battalion each of the 108th and 56th Bdes attached; and one battalion of the 108th Bde in reserve. The S. African Bde, actually a weak battalion, had a battalion of the 108th Bde and a company of the 5/S. Wales Borderers (Pioneers) attached to it.

Under the 9th Divn were: the 62nd Bde with the pioneers of the 21st Divn attached; the 58th, 26th and 27th Bdes, with (after 1 P.M.) the 64th in reserve.

³ The 17th Reserve, which had side-stepped to the north and allowed the 49th Reserve to come in on its left.

different brigades under Br.-General T. A. Cubitt (57th Bde) were not attacked until 3 P.M., when, after a heavy barrage, the left of the S. African Bde, which was still holding the ground gained in the previous evening's counter-attack, lost six hundred yards of it; but this was immediately regained by a fresh counter-attack. A second German effort at the same place captured a little less ground, but the ensuing counter-attack this time resulted in heavy losses. The S. Africans, assisted by the 1/R. Irish Fusiliers (108th Bde), managed to hold their ground, though at 7 P.M. it was judged advisable to send two companies of the 12/R. Irish Rifles (108th Bde) from divisional reserve to support them.

The 26th Bde, and that part of the 27th of the 9th Divn which stood south of the Ypres—Comines canal, on the reverse slopes of the Ypres ridge, were attacked at 8 A.M. In the morning mist it was difficult to determine whether the figures emerging from Oosttaverne and from Ravine Wood and moving towards Onraet Wood and the Damstrasse were friend or foe; so they were allowed to approach to within a hundred and fifty yards, when they were shot down by the 9/Seaforth (Pioneers), 8/Black Watch and 7/Seaforth (26th Bde), the last battalion counter-attacking and taking prisoners and three machine guns. A strong enemy advance against the extreme left near Hollebeke broke down under artillery and small-arms fire, and the rest of the day then passed uneventfully. At 1 P.M. the 64th Bde (Br.-General H. R. Headlam), of the 21st Divn,¹ in reserve south of Ypres, was offered by Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley (XXII. Corps), and allotted to the 9th Divn for the purpose of regaining the high ground west and north of Oosttaverne; but as the defence had been so successful, this idea was abandoned. When night fell, the 9th Divn, less the S. African Brigade-Battalion (transferred to the 57th Bde), but plus the 58th (of the 19th Divn), 62nd and 64th Bdes, was holding a front of no less than five and a half miles.

It was the situation south of the Douve which had caused uneasiness to the commanders of the IX. Corps and the 19th and 9th Divns throughout the day. At 10 A.M. Lieut.-General Gordon held a conference with his divisional commanders at Dranoutre (2½ miles north-west

¹ The 21st Divn was still "less artillery", which had been in support of the French; its batteries arrived in Flanders on 14th April, and were then attached to the French 188rd Divn.

of Neuve Eglise) at which it was settled that if the right and right centre of the corps found it necessary to withdraw under pressure of the German attack, they would do so by pivoting on Wytschaete. By noon Major-Generals Jeffreys and Tudor had received news of the attack against the 25th Divn and the threat to Hill 63, the capture of which would enable the enemy to take Messines Ridge in reverse. Soon after 10.30 A.M., Major-General Jeffreys sent No. 6 Motor Machine-Gun Battery, put at his disposal by the IX. Corps, to the high ground south of Wulverghem, to cover the valley of the Douve, and at 2.15 P.M. he gave orders for the formation of a right defensive flank. At 2.40 P.M., after informing the IX. Corps of his intention, he issued instructions that if the enemy succeeded in capturing Hill 63, Br.-General Cubitt's command should swing back, pivoting on Bogaert Farm, a quarter of a mile south of Wytschaete, and make junction with the 25th Divn, 1,500 yards north-east of Neuve Eglise. A nucleus force was to be sent back at once to this line.

Official reports of the disaster which had occurred at Hill 63 at 5.30 P.M. and of the retirement of the 7th Bde had not reached the 19th Divn when, at 8.40 P.M., the 9/R. Irish Fusiliers (108th Bde), on the extreme right near the Douve, reported that it was coming under fire from the right rear owing to the capture of Hill 63. At 9.20 P.M., therefore, acting on the arrangements settled by Lieut.-General Gordon at his 10 A.M. conference and subsequently confirmed by written instructions at 5.52 P.M., issued after the approval of General Plumer had been obtained, Major-General Jeffreys directed that the warning order given at 2.40 P.M. should be carried out. The swing back was completed before dawn; but, in accordance with corps instructions, the point of junction with the 25th Divn was the high ground south of Wulverghem. The 9th Divn, on learning from the 19th of its intended withdrawal, at 11.45 P.M. ordered the 62nd, its right brigade, to conform by swinging its right back a little, whilst still retaining Wytschaete, with a post at Peckham to maintain touch with the 19th Divn. The formal corps order for the retirement was issued at 11.30 P.M., after Lieut.-General Gordon, who had been shelled out of Flêtre, had moved his headquarters back four miles, to St. Sylvestre. The Second Army order was timed 11.55 P.M. Both orders merely gave authority for what had already been done.¹

¹ Appendix 9.

There had been great air activity on both sides after the mist cleared off at midday.¹ Many encounters between fighting formations took place; but until 4 P.M. the main enemy air activity was south of La Bassée; after that hour it centred over the battle area. British air observers, however, were able to report the position of the front line. The fighter squadrons were once more ordered to concentrate on low bombing attacks. Some five hundred and fifty 25-lbs. and 112-lbs. bombs were dropped on the battle area, some of which damaged bridges over the Lys; and a large number fell on Armentières, the principal villages and the roads, whilst 50,000 rounds were fired from machine guns.

During the evening, General Plumer reported by telephone to G.H.Q. that he had, after consultation with Lieut.-General Gordon, authorized the latter to withdraw during the night to the general line Steenwerck station—Wyttschaete and that, in order to conform with this movement, the corps to the north, the XXII., VIII. and II., would withdraw to the Battle Zone, although only very gradually, leaving outposts in the Forward Zone. He added that he considered the retirement inevitable in consequence of the pressure on his right wing, which might make a subsequent withdrawal of his left very difficult, and that he had asked the Belgians to conform.

As will be seen from the map, the threat against Hazebrouck was now very pronounced: the German front at the close of the 11th April formed a salient with its apex almost in Nieppe Forest, nine miles west of the front line on the 9th April, whilst its faces extended back to Givenchy and Hollebeke. If the enemy pressed much farther, he might not only reach Hazebrouck, but separate the First and Second Armies and then cut off the latter.

Maps
17, 18.
Sketch
19.

On the fronts of the French Sixth, Third and First Armies, and British Fourth (Fifth) and Third Armies, facing the German *Eighteenth*, *Second* and *Seventeenth Armies* on the March battlefield, there was almost complete quiet.

Since the beginning of the offensive on the 21st March, the Germans had employed 106 divisions—93 in the Picardy

¹ The German *Fourth Army* Diary says: "The air forces exhibited only "towards evening a certain activity above the field of battle; on the coast "it was very violent". At 9.10 A.M. the Army asked for 23 more flights (of 9 planes each).

battles, and 13 in the Flanders battle on the 9th and 10th April, in addition to the divisions originally holding the line. It was estimated by the Intelligence Branch at G.H.Q. that they still had 29 divisions in reserve, of which 20 were opposite the British, 14 of them in Flanders. The British divisions (3rd, 61st, 81st, 29th and 49th), sent up without artillery to the battle, had been broken up and used brigade-wise to patch up the front. General Plumer had denuded his Army and sent as many reinforcements as he could to the First and Third Armies, and, by exchange, had nothing but divisions which had fought in the March battle; it was now a matter of sending assistance back to him. The 38rd Division (less artillery) was on its way, and, as we have seen, towards night the 100th Brigade had gone to support the badly mauled 25th Divn; the 98th was in rear of the 19th Divn; the 19th was at Meteren; the 1st Australian Division, from the Amiens front, had been ordered to Hazebrouck. Sir Douglas Haig considered that, without unduly weakening the line to the south and thus risking a breach of the connection with the French, there were no other reinforcements available except the 39th Divn, which had lost heavily in March, and had on the 8th April begun moving northwards by train to the Second Army as a training division for the American Expeditionary Force. On the evening of the 10th, this division was ordered to form a strong composite brigade, which was to join the XXII. Corps, while its machine-gun battalion was allotted to the XI. Corps.¹

Four French divisions were due to cross the Somme moving northwards on the 12th, so it might be possible to send one more division from the Third to the Second Army. In the afternoon of the 11th, Sir Douglas Haig motored to General Plumer's headquarters at Cassel, and found him quietly confident that the worst of the German onslaught was over. It was arranged that the postponed transfer of the XV. Corps (81st, 84th, 40th Divns, and attached troops of the 25th, 29th and 49th) from the First to the Second Army should take place at noon next day.²

On his return to Montreuil, the Commander-in-Chief, who, with his Chief of the Staff, felt that, so far, the French

¹ The 52nd (Lowland) Division, which had been operating in Palestine, sailed from Alexandria for Marseilles on 11th April.

² Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle was to replace Lieut.-General Sir J. Du Cane at 9 A.M., the latter proceeding, as arranged, to General Foch's headquarters.

troops moved up behind Amiens had been more of an inconvenience than a help, wrote to General Foch pointing out the shortage of reserves on the battle front, and asking him to concentrate at least four divisions between St. Omer and Dunkirk, in readiness to support the British. This letter was taken to Sarcus by Major-General J. H. Davidson, Major-General of the General Staff and head of the Operations Branch G.H.Q., who explained to General Foch the whole situation of the British Armies, emphasizing that the pressure on the Second Army was still severe, and that the Commander-in-Chief was unable to send further help to General Plumer. In reply, General Foch insisted that the British forces must "hold on where they stood", and that he "could not guarantee any reinforcement beyond the divisions already detailed": he offered the advice, indicating his meaning on a map, that the British should form a pocket round the area into which the Germans had broken, which, of course, had already been done, and handed to Major-General Davidson another Note in which he said:

"1. The first thing to do is to stop the German advance
"on Hazebrouck;

"For this:

"2. Check the enemy with the troops already fighting, reinforced as sparingly as possible;

"3. Bring him to a standstill by the immediate occupation, with the assistance of troops brought up, and then by the organization in a continuous and well connected front of the line [north to south] Mount Kemmel—Neuve Eglise—Bailleul—edge of Nieppe Forest—Merville—River Clarence—Mont Bernenchon—Hinges Wood, to which the reinforcements must be sent."¹

General Foch was resolute in his refusal to take over any of the British front or to provide divisions to construct and occupy the above-named line. The only helpful thing he would do was to promise that the French II. Cavalry Corps, already moving north, and due at Hesdin (36 miles south-west of Hazebrouck) on the evening of the 12th, should continue on to Cassel to support General Plumer.

At this interview, and at others during the battle which Sir Douglas Haig, General Lawrence and Major-General

¹ The printed version given in F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 441, is slightly different: the end runs, after defining the position, "which should be organized and occupied in advance by troops of the reserve [*sic*]. Obtain the result in particular by the action of artillery on the flanks of the attack".

Davidson had with General Foch on the subject of furnishing assistance, the latter invariably referred to the Lys attack as "la bataille du nord", seeming to hint that it was entirely a British affair, and G.H.Q. had better recognize it as such. Further he suggested that too much must not be expected of the French troops, although they had to some extent recovered their morale shaken by the accumulated effect of the great efforts and losses of 1914 and 1915; of Verdun and the Somme in 1916; and of the serious overstrain in 1917, which Marshal Joffre had been anxious to avoid, but had been brought about by the Nivelle offensive, and followed by the mutinies. They could not as yet, he hinted, be relied upon for any major operations under specially difficult conditions, such as the entry into a defensive battle in which the defenders were being daily forced to give ground. General Pétain, too, was anxious about his front and unwilling to part with divisions. General Foch did move up French divisions progressively—as can be seen from the situation maps—behind the British front, to the congestion of the back areas and the detriment of the railway and other communications. When expostulations were made and the inconvenience was pointed out of thus massing French troops in the British zone if there were no intention of using them, he replied that their presence had a moral value. This seemed to G.H.Q. to indicate clearly that the French divisions were only there for show.

It will probably be accepted by readers of the story of the battle as it proceeds that General Foch was right in assuming that the British would manage somehow or other to hold on and bring the Germans to a halt in their fierce assault against the sector covering the Channel ports, which meant so little to the French but were vital to the British. Further, readers will see that the French assistance sent was not of great use except to hold parts of the line not seriously attacked. The taking over of a seven-mile sector of the British line by the Détachment d'Armée du Nord during the 19th–20th April led to Mount Kemmel being lost, and the French made no serious effort to recover it. This apathy created a painful impression upon the British units with whom they were co-operating. Among regimental officers it was said that the French *poilu* had no interest in operations in Belgian Flanders and that he had been resting so long that, as a rider long absent from the hunting field looks on quite small fences as formidable obstacles, he

regarded simple attacks against a tired and exhausted enemy as too difficult for his powers. In any case, the two factors in General Foch's mind, that the British could very well look after themselves and that the French required careful nursing, must be borne in mind in weighing his conduct during the Lys battle in the north.

The situation was viewed with great anxiety by the authorities in England. Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, telegraphed to General Foch : “the question of flooding the country round Dunkirk and “from Aire to St. Omer and the coast, about which I spoke “to you yesterday, requires immediate attention”.¹ General Foch, next day, gave authority for such inundations along the course of the Aa below St. Omer as could be created by fresh water, that is by closing sluices and outlets, for which preparations had been made from 1915 onwards by the Engineer-in-Chief.

It was on this day that the Commander-in-Chief issued the special Order of the Day, which became popularly known as “the backs to the wall message”.² To many officers and men at the front it was the first intimation that the situation was really serious; it aroused throughout the fighting troops a strong wave of determination not to be beaten, and they responded to it by giving of their best.³ It had also a most valuable effect in the United Kingdom, and on “resting” troops and men of the rearward services.

¹ This refers to a telephone message on the same subject sent by General Wilson on the 10th, in which he said that the British forces could be supplied without use of Dunkirk, but not without Calais and Boulogne. “As a last “resource, the British Army can hold the line Abbeville—St. Omer and “maintain liaison on the Somme or by the sea, if the French Army always “hold the left bank of the Somme, which it is important to fortify.”

² Appendix 10.

³ The following order actually issued by a subaltern in the 1st Australian Division was picked up during a visit to the trenches by a First Army liaison officer :

“Special orders to No. . . . Section :

“(1) This position will be held, and the section will remain here until “relieved.

“(2) The enemy cannot be allowed to interfere with this programme.

“(3) If the section cannot remain here alive it will remain here dead, “but in any case it will remain here.

“(4) Should any man through shell shock or other cause attempt to “surrender he will remain here dead.

“(5) Should all guns be blown out, the section will use Mills grenades “and other novelties.

“(6) Finally the position as stated will be held.”

NOTE I

THE FRENCH ON THE 11TH APRIL¹

The General-in-Chief [Pétain], in consequence of his interview with General Foch during the afternoon of the 10th, did no more than direct the Tenth Army, on the 11th and 12th April, to carry out the movements forecast in his orders of the 7th² and to take over the billeting zones as they were gradually handed over by the British. General Maistre, whose headquarters were moved on the 11th to Hornoy (6 miles north-west of Poix which is 18 miles south-west of Amiens), was directed to study the eventual intervention of his Army either towards Amiens or towards Arras.

On the 11th April, in consequence of these directions, the Tenth Army began its movement towards the north; it advanced its two leading divisions (34th and 154th) to the line Poix—Thieulloy l'Abbaye (3 miles north-west of Poix). The II. Cavalry Corps, more to the west on either side of the Bresle, reached the area [15 miles south-west of Abbeville] of Blangy—Oisement—Richemont; the 14th and 129th Divisions were to move next day by lorry.

During the morning of the 11th, in consequence of the arrangements made during the night at Montreuil,³ General Pétain modified the instructions given on the previous day to General Maistre. The Tenth Army on the 12th was to send two divisions (14th and 129th) in lorries to the line Doullens—Vauchelles (6 miles south-east of Doullens), with the two other divisions (34th and 154th) astride the Somme; if the British did not hand over the necessary billeting areas in time, the heads of the columns would halt abreast of Villers Bocage. In any case, the dispositions made should permit the Tenth Army to advance with two divisions in line either towards the north-east or the south-east.

In the course of the afternoon of the 11th, General Maistre came to the conclusion that it was impossible for him to conform strictly to these instructions, partly by reason of the evacuation of the area north of the Somme by the British being incomplete, and partly on account of the insufficient time allowed to him; as regards the 12th, he did not, however, change the orders previously given which contemplated the billeting of his four divisions, with their heads on the Somme, between Picquigny and Montières, but certain elements were to be pushed [six miles] north of the river, to the line Vignacourt—Flesselles—Vaux—Longpré.

It was easier to arrange the movements of the troops of the Fifth Army which General Foch had decided to push towards the north after the Tenth Army. On the 11th, the General-in-Chief requested General Micheler to place the XVI. Corps (General Corvisart) north of the line Beauvais—Breteuil where it was to be ready to act with its four divisions either towards Amiens, or more to the south to help the G.A.R. The XX. Corps was to be kept, under the name of Groupement de l'Oise, to the east of the river, the 153rd Division advancing into the Croix Saint Ouen area [3 miles south of Compiègne] north of the 11th Division, which was to be left in the Pont Saint Maxence area [20 miles south of Montdidier].

¹ Abbreviated translation from F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 436-8.

² See page 142.

³ See page 217.

During the afternoon of the 11th, however, these orders were modified. The General-in-Chief, as it turned out, was compelled to give General Fayolle (G.A.R.) the XX. Corps, with its two divisions (11th and 153rd), in order to allow him to relieve the VI. Corps and (*sic*) two tired divisions (163rd and 166th);¹ he then proposed that the Groupement de l'Oise, thus dissolved, should be reconstituted by three divisions (43rd, 47th and 72nd), which were expected to arrive very soon in the Fifth Army, and would be placed under the orders of the commander of the V. Corps.

Finally, the General-in-Chief requested General Franchet d'Espérey to prepare for the transport towards the G.A.R. of one fresh division, which would be exchanged for the 163rd (which had just come out of the battle), and of the 39th Division, which had just been received from the G.A.E.

The battle air squadrons, which were all employed with the G.A.R., also received during the day the orders necessary to increase the possibilities of their intervention more to the north. General Fayolle ordered Squadron No. 1 or Groupement Ménard to leave Le Plessis Belleville [north-east of Paris] and establish itself in the area west of Amiens, at Airaines and Montagne.

"Thus the French reserves, from the third day of the second German offensive, began to extend their advance towards the north commenced on the 22nd March; they now entered the British zone; they were soon to echelon themselves behind the whole front of our Allies, and then intervene in the very centre of their Armies."

To sum up what happened :

By the evening of the 11th, General Robillot (II. Cavalry Corps)² had his divisions astride the Bresle, thirty miles west of Amiens, the 2nd on the eastern bank, the 3rd and 6th on the western. Of the course of events in the north he was entirely ignorant, but during the night of the 11th/12th he received vague news, partly by telephone and partly through the press, of the penetration of the British front in Flanders. He was summoned to General Foch's headquarters at Sarcus (25 miles south-west of Amiens) early on the 12th, where he was told that his corps, leaving the Tenth Army, was to move forthwith to the St. Omer area in order to take part in the battle now being fought on the Lys; the march—some seventy miles—was to be completed by the evening of the 13th, but, in any case, he was to cross the Somme between Hangest and Pont Rémy—that is above Abbeville—on the 12th, so that by the evening of that day he would have the heads of his columns on the river Authie—thirty miles from the Bresle.

The four infantry divisions of General Maistre, Tenth Army, did not move appreciably on the 11th; but the 133rd Divn left Poix by rail for Bergues (7 miles south of Dunkirk), and the 28th Division, from near Belfort, also entrained for the same destination.

¹ The VI. Corps throughout 1918 is shown as consisting of the 12th, 127th, 56th and 166th Divisions (French Order of Battle, i., p. 662).

² See Boullaire, pp. 269-71.

NOTE II

THE GERMANS ON THE 11TH APRIL

Map 17. The *Sixth Army* on the evening of the 10th gave orders for the *II. Bavarian Corps* (five divisions) and *XIX. Corps* (five divisions) to reach the high ground at Bailleul, Meteren, Strazeele on the 11th April; touch was to be gained with the *Fourth Army* about Nieppe. The *LV. Corps* (four divisions) and *IV. Corps* (seven divisions) were to continue their efforts to capture the crossings over the Aire—La Bassée canal and the river Clarence.

The *Fourth Army* issued orders for the continuation of the attack, and laid special stress on the necessity for the capture of Wytschaete and Wulverghem by the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* (7th and 17th *Reserve Divisions* on the battle front) and for the pinching out of Armentières by the *X. Reserve Corps* (11th *Bavarian*, 22nd *Reserve*, 31st, 36th *Reserve*, 49th *Reserve* and 214th *Divisions*) in conjunction with the right of the *Sixth Army*.

The German accounts so far available, including the war archives of the German *Fourth Army*, do not allude to the failure to achieve what had been ordered, although seven fresh divisions arrived to increase the reserve: the 240th and 12th near La Bassée behind the *IV. Corps*; the 19th *Reserve*, *Alpine Corps* and 235th near Lille, behind the *II. Bavarian Corps*; and the 36th *Reserve* (sent to the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*) opposite Ploegsteert, and the 83rd near Menin, in the *X. Reserve Corps* area, thus increasing the numerical superiority to 31 divisions (of which 10 had been in the March fighting) against 13.

"The *Sixth Army* met with great success, as the pressure from "north and south against Armentières resulted in the capture of "the town with 3,000 prisoners and 40 guns."¹ In spite of strong opposition, the *II. Bavarian Corps* reached the line Nieppe—Steenwerck station—Le Verrier; and the *XIX. Corps*, Doulieu and north-east of Merville.

The 8th *Bavarian Reserve Division* (*LV. Corps*) during the day reached the south-eastern edges of Merville and Grand Pacaut, both strongly held. East of Meurillon (a mile east of Merville on the south bank of the Lys), however, the advance was checked temporarily by the strong resistance encountered, and by enfilade fire from north of the Lys, where the 8th *Division*, which the *LV. Corps* brought up into the front line immediately on the left of the *XIX. Corps*, only gained ground slowly in the area between Neuf Berquin and the Lys. The 8th *Division*, however, by the end of the day had nearly reached the eastern edge of Merville, and during the night

¹ Schwarte iii., p. 442. The official bulletin from O.H.L. said: "Armentières has fallen. Enveloped from north and south by the troops "of Generals von Eberhardt and von Stellen, the British garrison—50 "officers and more than 3,000 men—after a brave defence, laid down their "arms."

Armentières was evacuated; not captured. This strange claim is proof sufficient of the disappointment felt by General Ludendorff. The grand total of the defenders, after deducting the losses from gas before the 9th, did not reach 3,000. The number of men cut off and captured was insignificant, and only two guns were lost, and these by fire. See page 287, f.n. 1.

of the 11th/12th occupied the northern^f edge. The attack of the 16th Division (*LV. Corps*), south of the 8th Bavarian Reserve Division, came to a standstill east of the Paradis—Grand Pacaut road.

Part of the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division (*LV. Corps*) crossed the Lawe north of Vieille Chapelle—still held by the British—behind the left flank of the 16th Division, some of whose troops had already been diverted from the north against the village. By dark, part of the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division had reached the road junction south of Paradis and Zelobes. Another portion of the division had become involved in the fighting for Vieille Chapelle, which was not captured until the afternoon.

At Festubert and Givenchy, the *IV. Corps* was still unable to make any progress.

In the *Fourth Army*, the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* captured a wood near Wytschaete after hard fighting, and gained ground also near Wulverghem. The *X. Reserve Corps* advanced beyond the western edge of Ploegsteert Wood, and its left flank got touch with the *Sixth Army* near Le Romarin.

At 11.45 A.M. the Kaiser visited *Fourth Army* headquarters and during the day the Army commander issued an order announcing his arrival and conveying an Imperial message to the troops. In this, the Kaiser expressed his best wishes and thanks for the efforts made hitherto, also his firm conviction that in the coming days each individual would do all he could to ensure a decisive victory over "our British enemy".^f

During the 11th April, O.H.L., which was anxious for the *Sixth Army* to push on more quickly, had urged it to bring up fresh divisions. The headquarters of the *Sixth Army* refused, on the grounds that more troops would only hamper the operations, in view of the bad condition of the communications, and that it was more important to move the artillery to support the infantry of divisions already in action—the infantry, according to the diary of the *Fourth Army* had frequently halted and waited for artillery support—as well as to ensure a greater supply of ammunition. It would seem that the shelling and bombing of the few roads available had exercised a great effect in slowing down the German advance, as it was impossible to move heavy vehicles across country over the marshy plain of the Lys.

Ludendorff¹ says: "The enemy's machine guns continued to give our infantry much trouble. It should have grappled with them more seriously. . . . That certain divisions had obviously failed to show any inclination to attack in the plain of the Lys gave food for thought. However, in that low-lying, intersected country it had been so difficult to arrange proper artillery support that this phenomenon did not cause grave anxiety."

¹ ii., pp. 608, 611.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

12TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLE OF HAZEBROUCK

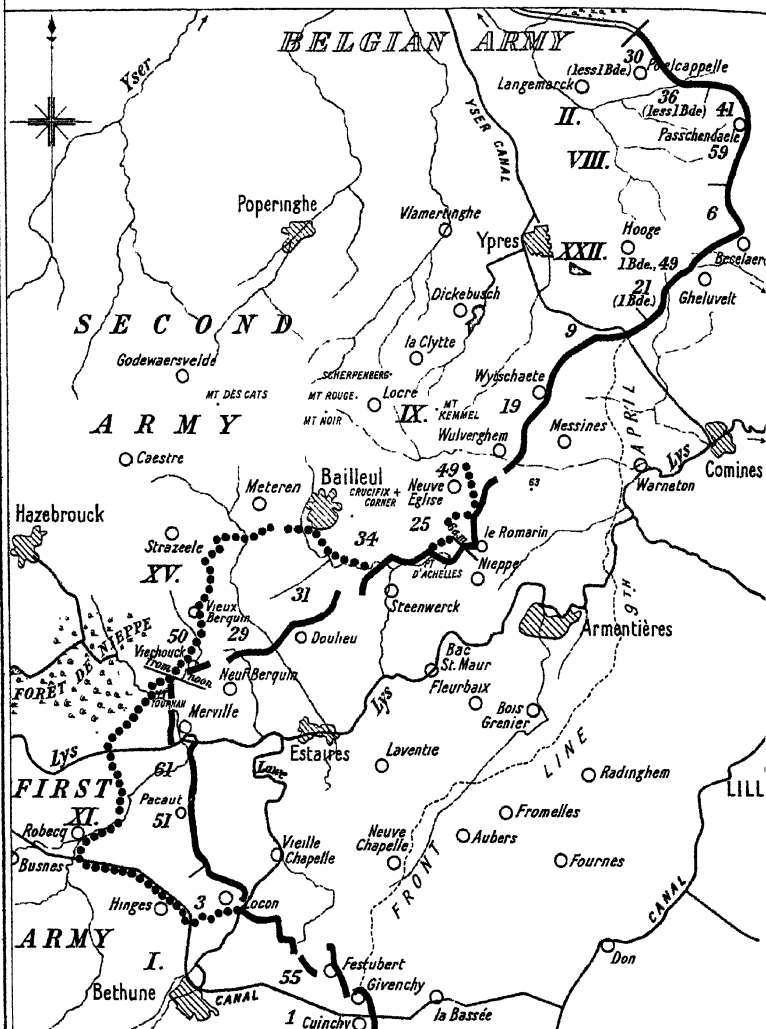
(Maps 13, 14, 18 ; Sketch 20)

Map 18. THE 12th April was a very critical day. Against certain
Sketch parts of the line the Germans attacked with great deter-
20. mination, and it became a question whether the tired and inter-mixed troops, with battalions commanded by very junior officers, and staffs working in reliefs so as to obtain a little sleep, could hold out until reinforcements arrived. During the greater part of the day the front line was not continuous, parts were constantly shifting ; and, in spite of hourly reports from the air, the divisional staffs did not know at any moment how the front was situated in sufficient time to exercise much control over the action. It must also be recalled that few of the divisions were supported by their own artillery, owing to the infantry reinforcements having been rushed up, by train, bus and lorry, the guns following by road.¹ There was not, therefore,

¹ The 3rd Divn had no artillery till night, when its own XL. Brigade and the 158th Army Brigade arrived ; the 4th had that of the 50th until its own arrived, one brigade on the 17th and the other on the 25th ; the 5th had none till its own arrived on the evening of the 12th ; the 9th had its own and the 156th Brigade (38rd Division) ; the 19th had its own and the 162nd Brigade (38rd Division) and the XXXVIII. Army Brigade ; the 21st was supported by that of the 49th ; the 25th, by the LXXXVIII. Brigade (19th Divn), the XI. Brigade and the II. New Zealand Brigade ; the 29th left its guns at Ypres, its brigades receiving the support of the artillery of the divisions to which they were allotted ; the 31st had that of the 57th, and the LXIV. and 119th Army Brigades (see 40th Dn : the 57th Division artillery had been with the 40th Dn since the 31st March) ; the 38rd, that of the 25th (which arrived on the 11th) and the 118th Army Brigade ; the 34th, that of the 38th ; the 40th, the same as the 31st ; the 49th left its guns at Ypres, its brigades receiving the support of the artillery of the divisions to which they were allotted ; the 50th had the artillery of the 34th ; the 51st, its own and the XII. Australian Brigade ; the 55th, its own ; and the 61st, its own.

Sketch 20.

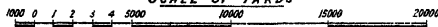
THE LYS, 12TH APRIL.



REFERENCE

Line 12th April. 13th April a.m.
 Army boundaries Corps boundaries.

SCALE OF YARDS



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Ordnance Survey 1

the close co-operation which comes of long comradeship. The changes in Army and corps boundaries necessitated new allotments of artillery tasks, and the increased front of the IX. Corps was divided between four artillery groups, containing both field and heavy artillery, and covering, from right to left, the 34th Divn, the 33rd Division, and the 25th and 19th Divns.¹

Some changes for the better control of the operations and administration, ordered on the 11th April, took place ; but the actual fighting remained a brigadiers' and soldiers' battle, and orders from the higher staffs, as a rule, merely gave approval to what had already been arranged. The changes therefore hardly affect the story except as regards the compartments in which it is told. From midday, the boundary between the Second and First Armies was shifted south, from just north of Armentières to two miles north of the Lys at Merville : that is, the XV. Corps passed from the command of General Horne to that of General Plumer. At an earlier hour, 8 A.M., the 55th Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine) and the 3rd Divn (Major-General C. J. Deverell), the right wing of the XI. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking), were transferred to the I. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Holland), which was thus put astride both the La Bassée and the Lawe canals. At the same time, the 50th Dn (Major-General H. C. Jackson), north of the Lys, was taken from the XV. Corps and added to the XI. Corps, which, extended along a six-mile front astride the Lys, now consisted of the 51st Dn, 50th Dn and 61st Divn, with the 5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stephens) fresh from Italy, in Army reserve seven miles behind the front line. Owing to fighting being in progress, the actual transfer of the 50th Dn did not take place until shortly after midday.

The statement handed to Sir Douglas Haig on the morning of the 12th by Br.-General E. W. Cox, the head of the Intelligence Branch at G.H.Q., showed, quite correctly as is now known, that on the previous day there had been 23 German divisions, including the 48th Reserve in second line, between the La Bassée canal and the Ypres—Comines canal : of these, 15 were south and eight north of Armentières ; besides the total of 111 divisions engaged on the battle front, there were 24 fresh divisions in reserve, of which 15 were opposite the British front, in addition to 18

¹ The 33rd had two 6-inch howitzer batteries ; the 25th and 19th had each one 6-inch howitzer and two 60-pdr. batteries. In the XV. Corps the whole of the heavy artillery was kept under corps control.

which had only been engaged once in the battle. This made a total of 153 divisions out of the 199 on the Western Front, which had been employed or were available to be employed against the 59 British divisions, of which all but six had already been engaged, and the French divisions which had come to their assistance.

At 9 A.M. a message was telephoned from General Foch's headquarters to G.H.Q. intimating that he considered it imperative that the British Cavalry Corps should be sent at the earliest moment on this same day to the neighbourhood of Aire to be in a position to help the troops opposing the German advance on Hazebrouck :¹ he, on his part, was sending his best cavalry corps to the vicinity of St. Omer, where it would be, on the afternoon of the 13th, in a position to co-operate with the French 138rd Divn on its arrival to reinforce General Plumer's Army.²

At 9.55 A.M., therefore, G.H.Q. sent orders to the Cavalry Corps to march at once to Aire, where it would come under the orders of the First Army. In transmitting the above information to Generals Horne and Plumer, G.H.Q. directed them, in accordance with the wishes of General Foch expressed in the Note handed to Major-General Davidson at 11 P.M. on the previous night, to organize a line Kemmel—Neuve Eglise—Bailleul—Nieppe Forest to the neighbourhood of Hinges—it was already in preparation—"on which the enemy must be held at all costs".

In order to re-establish the situation about Merville, lost during the night, General Horne at 7.30 A.M. had given orders for the recapture of the town by converging counter-attacks of the XI. and XV. Corps, from the west and north. For this purpose, he released the 5th Division from Army reserve and placed it at the disposal of the XI. Corps; he subsequently transferred the 4th Divn from the XVII. to the I. Corps, next on the north, where it was to remain in reserve, but not to be employed without reference to him. On receipt of the above G.H.Q. instructions, at 11.50 A.M. General Horne cancelled the orders for the

¹ The Cavalry Corps had received orders on the 10th to move to the vicinity of Doullens and St. Pol (20 miles south of Aire); and on the morning of the 12th the 1st Cavalry Divn was around Flers (3 miles south-west of St. Pol), and the 2nd and 3rd around Auxi le Chateau (10 miles north-west of Doullens) already on their way north.

² The 138rd Divn, which had been engaged in the latter part of the March fighting, alongside the XIX. Corps, had been ordered by rail to Bergues, 25 miles north-west of Ypres, near Dunkirk, where it arrived 12th-18th April: it then moved to Cassel.

counter-attacks, which, in consequence of enemy action, it had not been feasible to set in motion by that hour.

The Germans made no general attack; but, owing to the exhausted state of most of the British units, they gained minor successes at one or two points, which, on the levels of the Lys plain, enabled them to enfilade the line to the right and left, and thus occasion considerable retirements. In general, though the British centre near Vierhouck, where the 4th Guards Bde fought, stood fast, the enemy won two triangular areas of ground between Locon and Steenwerck, averaging about two miles in depth in the south and three in the north; and they also gained a little territory near Neuve Eglise.

Ground fog prevailed in the early morning, but soon cleared off, and the day turned out fine with good visibility, so that squadrons of the Royal Air Force were able to be active all day, greatly contributing to embarrass and stem the enemy's advance.

On the right of the battle line between the La Bassée and Lawe canals, where stood the three brigades of the 55th Division and the 9th Bde of the 3rd Divn, opposing four German divisions, no serious infantry fighting took place. Action was confined to shelling until the evening, when an attack was made on the left of the 165th Brigade (Br.-General L. B. Boyd-Moss); but this completely broke down and did not cross the wire. Next on the left, two battalions (2/Royal Scots and 1/R. Scots Fusiliers) of the 8th Bde (Br.-General B. D. Fisher) had relieved the 154th Bde (51st Dn), which went back to Busnes, during the night, leaving only the 76th Bde (Br.-General C. L. Porter) in reserve of the 3rd Divn; of the latter brigade's battalions, two were already strung out in support behind the front line of the 8th Bde, in the Hamel Switch and along the canal, covering Hinges. Opposite this sector, the Germans (*1st Bavarian Reserve Division*), who hitherto had given little trouble, remained quiet until 10.15 A.M., when the line of the 8th Bde was very heavily shelled; but no infantry attack followed until about 1 P.M. By this time the *16th Division* further to the north, had gained a considerable success which affected the whole of the British troops between the Lawe and the Lys.

At 5 A.M., in the dark and mist just before dawn, the *68th Infantry Regiment (16th Division)*, which had worked its way close up to the front line of the two very weak

152nd and 153rd Bes (51st Dn), broke through the centre at Pacaut in the first rush and advanced rapidly in spite of the resistance offered by small parties and the 8/Royal Scots (Pioneers), the support of the 152nd Be. Within half an hour it had penetrated two thousand yards into the British position. In the village of Le Cornet Malo, the headquarters of the two brigades, the leading Germans, approaching from the south-west, captured Br.-General J. K. Dick-Cunyngham and the staff of the 152nd Be, together with a few men of the 404th Field Company R.E.; Lieut.-Colonel L. M. Dyson (commanding the 153rd Be) only just escaped. They then spread fan-wise north, west and south, enfilading the lines on either side of the gap. One party even reached Baquerolles Farm, on the Clarence, the right flank of the advanced posts of the 182nd Bde (61st Divn). The head of this brigade was on the line of the river, behind the 153rd Be, covering a front of 2,500 yards as far north as Calonne, with the 183rd Bde north of it and the 184th Bde three miles in rear. Other enemy parties nearly reached Robecq.¹

The rapid advance of the enemy almost resulted in the capture of the 51st Dn artillery and of the XII. Australian Field Artillery Brigade, attached to it. Two batteries of the 255th Brigade R.F.A., in action west of Pacaut Wood, which is adjacent to the La Bassée canal, had to be abandoned, the enemy shooting down the teams with machine guns at 150 yards' range. The other two batteries of the brigade managed to cross the canal and then, each dropping a gun two hundred yards beyond the canal, prevented the enemy from following over the bridges. The bridges were held by the artillery personnel until the infantry arrived, when the batteries were sent to the south of Hinges. The 256th Brigade R.F.A., three quarters of a mile north-east of Robecq, assisted by the staff of the 153rd Be, and the XII. Australian Field Artillery Brigade, near Calonne, managed to get away under close machine-gun fire and come into action again.

In falling back, some men of the 152nd Be, consisting mainly of a party of reinforcements for the 4/Seaforth Highlanders (154th Be) attached to the 152nd, formed a line

¹ By the courtesy of Colonel Wolfgang Foerster, Director of the *Forschungsanstalt für Kriegs- und Heeresgeschichte* (formerly the *Reichsarchiv*), an account of this surprise from the German side has been obtained. Being of great interest as showing the determination and skill with which the German attacks were conducted, the account has been translated in Note III. at end of Chapter.

from the original left back to Pacaut Wood, thus making a defensive flank. Meanwhile Br.-General K. G. Buchanan, of the 154th Be which had been relieved during the night, alarmed about 6 A.M. by the sight of stragglers of the 152nd Be crossing the canal, sent parties to hold the canal bridges west of Pacaut Wood, where a few men of the 404th Field Company R.E. and of the pioneer battalion were also assembled.

To the right of the German inroad, the 8th Bde did not receive any reports until 7.40 A.M. as to the fact that enemy troops had actually passed westward of its left. It was then learnt that the 1/R. Scots Fusiliers, in the front line, had formed a defensive flank to guard a gap which had arisen on its left owing to the weakness of the 152nd Be. Next came the news that the enemy had reached Pacaut Wood, on which rested the left of the brigade's second line in Hamel Switch; further that he was pushing on to the river Clarence, where overnight part of the 61st Divn had arrived. About the same time, the 3rd Divn heard that the Germans who were trying to cross the canal from Pacaut Wood had been driven back by artillery fire, but that others had reached Robecq. Yet further alarm was occasioned when the staff of the Inland Water Transport began to set fire to a number of its barges and sink others in the reaches of the canal near Robecq. Thereupon Major-General Deverell (headquarters at Oblinghem, south of Hinges), after visiting the neighbouring hill, Mont Bernenchon, whence he could see the abandoned guns of the 255th Brigade R.F.A., ordered the 8th Bde to hold firmly on to the Hamel Switch, while the 76th Bde (it had only one battalion at its disposal, but received half the 8/King's Own back from the 8th Bde) was directed to extend along the canal and gain touch with the 61st Divn near Robecq. Major-General Jeudwine (55th Division) despatched the remaining 170 men of the 1st King Edward's Horse, then at his headquarters, to the bridges. A canal line, 6,500 yards long, was thus successfully established and patrols could then be pushed over the canal. With a view to holding it, Lieut.-General Holland (I. Corps), who visited the 3rd Divn headquarters, under instructions from General Horne promised Major-General Deverell the assistance of the 4th Divn (less artillery).¹

¹ The 4th Divn was waiting ready to move at 4 hours' notice behind Arras, 20 miles south of Béthune. Ordered just before 8 A.M. to move to Lillers as soon as buses arrived, the 11th Bde embussed at 11 A.M., the 10th

Whilst the left flank of the 3rd Divn was thus endangered, at 10.15 A.M. a heavy bombardment fell on the front of its 8th Bde, and towards 1 P.M. infantry of the *18th Reserve Division* attacked on the right and broke into the northern end of Locon. Fighting continued for nearly two hours, and Br.-General B. D. Fisher (who had assumed the command on the previous day) reinforced it with one company from the Hamel Switch, to which he sent his last reserve, the 438th Field Company R.E. and the 8th Trench Mortar Battery. To fill the line north of the canal between the 4/Seaforth reinforcements and Pacaut Wood he was about to employ the 4/Gordon Highlanders from the Hamel Switch, when he learnt that Major-General Deverell, with the approval of Lieut.-General Holland, was then proposing to bring his left behind the canal, as the southern commanded the northern bank. Towards 3 P.M. the defensive flank of the 154th Be near Pacaut Wood was forced to retire, and in the course of the afternoon a new line was formed by the 3rd Divn from the reinforced left of the 55th on the Lawe canal, thence south of Locon to the Hamel Switch, and so along the canal.

The enemy who had occupied Locon remained quiet. But at 7.20 P.M. the bridge over the Lawe on the extreme right was fiercely attacked and at 8.20 P.M., after twenty minutes' shelling, a similar effort was made against the canal bridgehead east of Hinges; while at 2.50 A.M. the damaged Lawe bridge was again attacked although its demolition had been carried out three hours earlier. All these attacks were beaten off before reinforcements began to appear. During the night the 11th Bde (4th Divn) relieved the 76th Bde along the La Bassée canal from Pacaut Wood to Robecq; the main body of the 4th Divn (less artillery) was halted behind the 11th Bde, which was covering Lillers, with what remained of the 152nd, 153rd and 154th Bes collected on its left flank at Busnes.

Fortunately the success of the *16th Division* at Pacaut was not pressed in any way, either by cyclists, cavalry or tanks, as it might have been; there was a trickle through the British position, not a torrent, and its brilliant beginning achieved no more than a small gain of ground.

North of the 51st Dn on the left of the gap at Pacaut,

and machine-gun battalion at noon, and the 12th (in lorries) and the pioneer battalion at 1 P.M.; the field companies R.E. and field ambulances were distributed between the brigades.

the 183rd Bde (Br.-General A. H. Spooner) held the line with the 1/5th Cornwall L.I. (Pioneers) and the 5/Gordon Highlanders.¹ During the night the latter battalion had sent a strong officers' patrol across the Lys into Merville and found it unoccupied ; but about 7 A.M. this patrol was driven back, and the brigade was attacked from the gap on the right, whilst its left was heavily fired on from Merville. The two battalions and the fragments of the 153rd Be fell back on the support line ; but, continually enfiladed from the south, all semblance of a line was broken about 9 A.M., and the greater part of the two battalions was forced across the Lys canal, where, under orders of Br.-General H. J. Elles, they held on until relieved by the 5th Division.² The rest of the brigade and the 153rd Be, after a stand at Calonne, where the left flank of the 182nd Bde (Br.-General W. K. Evans) had been established, retired farther westward and northward. The 9/Royal Scots gained touch with the 5/Gordon Highlanders north of the Lys canal, but, as the Germans were infiltrating between the 182nd and 183rd Bdes, the left flank of the 182nd was swung back from the Clarence to run due north to the Lys canal. When, however, the 8/Argyll came up to join the 9/Royal Scots, the retirement of the 183rd Bde was brought to an end behind the left of the 182nd.

Now that all the brigades of the 51st Dn had retired behind the Clarence, those of the 61st Divn (Major-General C. J. Mackenzie) on that river became the front line. The course of events on the left of the 182nd Bde has been related. The right flank of the brigade at daybreak was

¹ The 9/Royal Scots was in reserve, the 8/Argyll had detrained during the night and was now on its way to St. Venant.

² Br.-General Elles, commanding the Tank Corps, had come up at 10 A.M. to visit the Lewis-gun detachments of the 11th Tank Battalion (1st Brigade), attached to the 61st Divn at 1 A.M., and took charge of the defence in the sector immediately north of the canal.

No tanks were available for Flanders. It is not clear from the records of the Tank Corps how many tanks had been lost in the German offensive : up to 27th March, the total had been 120 Mk. IV., said to be 60 per cent. of the strength, and 2 Medium A (Whippets). A Ministry of Munitions paper gives the total wastage by the middle of April as 257. At that date, the 1st Tank Brigade, with the First Army in the Aire—Béthune—Arras area, had 59 Mk. IV. tanks ; the 2nd Tank Brigade, with the Third Army, had lost 71 out of the 98 which it had on 21st March ; the 3rd Tank Brigade had just received 48 Whippets, some of which had been engaged ; the 4th Tank Brigade, which had been with the Fifth Army, had lost all its tanks, 81 Mk. IV., so the personnel of its three battalions had been sent to the front as Lewis-gun detachments ; the 5th Tank Brigade had been formed only on 2nd March and was training ; its Mk. V. machines were not yet ready to take the field.

still on the Clarence at Baquerolles Farm ; thence there was a gap of nearly two miles to Robecq, held by the 400th Field Company R.E. (51st Dn). Gradually reinforced by the stragglers that could be collected, it managed to drive off the Germans, who actually approached within a few hundred yards. Not until after 10 A.M. did the two leading battalions of the 184th Bde (Br.-General A. W. Pagan), which had been detraining at Steenbecque, seven miles away by road, begin to appear. Advancing deployed across country, by about 11 A.M. they had crossed the Clarence and the Noc without fighting except on the left near Baquerolles Farm, and then took position on the eastern side and to the east of Robecq, where touch was gained with the 3rd Divn. The 5/Gloucestershire,¹ the third battalion of the 184th Bde, was now in a position to support the hard pressed 183rd near the Lys. A new line, which at 9 A.M. Lieut.-General Haking had ordered to be held until the advance of the 5th Division took effect, was thus completed between the La Bassée canal and the Lys : the infantry was then able to report to the artillery a safe " shooting line ".

The Germans, on the other hand, were beginning to feel the effects of an ever-lengthening flank along the canal ; being also harassed by aeroplanes and artillery, they did not seem disposed to come on. The fighting having thus died down, it became possible to proceed with sorting out and reorganization. Bearing in mind the many days of fighting which the 61st Divn had passed through in March-April, it had responded wonderfully to the call made on it. The 153rd Be was now sent to join the rest of the 51st Dn near Busnes, thus completing the assembly of its infantry. In order to safeguard the connection between the 3rd and 61st Divns at the angle near Robecq, a composite brigade of some seventeen hundred men was organized from reinforcements for the 51st Dn and other troops in the vicinity, and placed in a position east and north of Robecq under command of Lieut.-Colonel J. G. Fleming (C.R.E., 51st Dn) ; it thus became known as " Fleming's Force ".²

On the three-mile front between the Lys and the Berquins road, the 151st, 150th and 149th Bes of the 50th Dn (Major-

¹ At St. Venant it had received a draft to fill its depleted ranks.

² It was made up of : reinforcements, 700 ; Nos. 1 and D Special (Gas) Companies R.E., 300 ; two companies 11th (Canadian) Railway Battalion, 250 ; one company each from the 51st and 39th Machine-Gun Battalions, 450.

General H. C. Jackson) had been strung out during the night, clear of Merville on the right; the 4th Guards Bde (Br.-General Hon. L. J. P. Butler) by early morning was supporting and partly holding the left. Though a fresh German division (*12th Reserve*) had been brought up from the second line to support the *35th* in this sector, the attack, which began about 8 A.M. was never driven home, and was directed mainly against the flanks. Nevertheless, it was sufficient to cause the scanty and exhausted troops of the 50th Dn to retire, but they did so slowly, hoping to be able to hold out until the afternoon, when the arrival on the field of the 5th Division was expected, fresh from Italy, and still 13 battalions strong—fine fit battalions of trained men, more or less up to establishment, not of untrained drafts like the greater part of the divisions engaged in the battle. But the 50th Dn did so well on the right that the enemy had not gained more than fifteen hundred yards by 3 P.M. Long before that hour Br.-General Elles had brought the Lewis guns of the 11th Tank Battalion into action on that flank, and had collected such troops of the 61st Divn as had crossed the Lys, together with stragglers of the 50th Dn for their support.

On the left, the 149th Be had fallen back more quickly, so that at 11 A.M. the 4th Guards Bde, 3/Coldstream on the right and 4/Grenadiers on the left, advanced by divisional orders issued at 8 A.M. to secure the line through Vieux Moulin, which lay twelve hundred yards ahead, in order to prevent any enemy movement on the Vieux Berquin road. By so doing, they had to abandon a good defensive position. Without machine guns and supported by only one battery, at the very start they came under very heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from the cottages and orchards which covered the dead flat ground around Neuf Berquin. In spite of losses, however, they pushed forward a quarter of a mile. Soon they found themselves threatened by an enveloping movement on the left, whilst, on the right the Germans were penetrating to the depth of almost a mile into a gap. The latter movement was dealt with by an immediate counter-attack of reserves; but the state of affairs on the left remained a grave danger. Here the 149th Be, reduced in the course of the day to two hundred of all ranks,¹ was driven northwards on to the 12/K.O.Y.L.I. (pioneers of the 31st Divn) extended in front of Vieux Berquin behind the gap between the 50th Dn and the 29th Division, where

¹ It had entered the battle only 1,700 strong.

the Yorkshiremen had been since the previous night. A company of the 2/Irish Guards from the reserve was sent to the 4/Grenadier Guards, but it was not employed, since connection was already established between the 4th Guards Bde line and the 12/K.O.Y.L.I. ; the latter was then placed under Br.-General Butler's orders.

Although the K.O.Y.L.I. were forced back a little distance, the 4th Guards Bde remained in position until dark, beating off all attempts made to dislodge it. The brigade was then withdrawn to its morning line, and extended to cover the old front of both the 150th and 149th Bes. It had, however, lost heavily, and the line, from the "Pont Tournant" on the Bourre to the eastern side of Vieux Berquin, with a salient in it, was over four thousand yards long, excluding the front of the K.O.Y.L.I. About half of it, from the Bourre to L'Épinette, was within the sector of the First Army ; it was therefore arranged that the 5th Division, whose arrival is narrated below, should take over the two thousand yards in the First Army sector during the night. In the dark, in strange, close country, the 95th Brigade (Br.-General Lord Esme Gordon-Lennox), to which was assigned the task, was not able to complete the relief—a long extension to its left—so that at daylight on the 18th the right of the 4th Guards Bde was still a thousand yards south of the Army boundary.

The 5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stephens), without its artillery which arrived later,¹ had spent the latter part of the night of the 11th/12th, eastward of Aire, eight miles behind the battle front. The bulk of the division had detrained at Thiennes (3 miles E.N.E. of Aire) and concentrated in the Boeseghem (3 miles north-east of Aire)—Thiennes area; its 15th Brigade, which had detrained at Aire, assembled around Molingham (3 miles south-east of Aire). The division was released by General Horne from the First Army reserve at 7.30 A.M. and handed over to the XI. Corps to make a counter-attack to recover Merville, advancing north and south of Nieppe Forest. The orders, which reached Major-General Stephens at 11.30 A.M., directed him first to establish two brigades, supported by the artillery when it arrived, east of Nieppe Forest, which, after rumours

¹ The 5th Division artillery (Br.-Gen. A. H. Hussey)—XV. and XXVII. Brigades R.F.A.—marched by road from the Doullens area, whilst the infantry, etc., came by train. It covered 85 miles on 11th April and 20 on the 12th, and at 5 P.M. came into action near Haverskerque in time to support the infantry.

that it had been entered by German cavalry, had been reported by aviators as clear of the enemy.

Major-General Stephens immediately put the orders into execution, sending the 13th Brigade (Br.-General L. O. W. Jones), with the 527th Field Company R.E., south of the forest, and the 95th (Br.-General Lord Esme Gordon-Lennox), with the 59th Field Company R.E., through the middle of it. The 15th (Br.-General R. D. F. Oldman), the reserve, at Molinghem was ordered to march via St. Venant, as this route, if the town were not in the hands of the enemy, would save a long detour which would have prevented the brigade reaching the battlefield on the 12th. The 491st Field Company R.E. was sent to secure the bridges on the canal eastward of Aire.¹ After visiting 61st Divn advanced headquarters in a cottage three miles west of St. Venant, to see Major-General Mackenzie who could not say for certain whether it was safe to march through St. Venant, but thought it worth risking, Major-General Stephens went forward through the forest. He learnt from the 95th Brigade that there were no troops in front of it except Br.-General Elles's force near Le Sart.

At 11.30 A.M., however, the G.H.Q. order of 9.55 A.M. reached General Horne, instructing the First and Second Armies to hold on to the Hinges—Kemmel line. This was passed on to Lieut.-General Haking and reached him at 12.5 P.M. The effect was to make the XI. Corps responsible for the sector Robecq to La Motte au Bois, that is the eastern part of Nieppe Forest was to be abandoned to the enemy. Accordingly fresh instructions were sent to the 5th Division cancelling the counter-attack and defining a line through the centre of the forest which was to be held.² This did not arrive at divisional headquarters until 1.30 P.M., when the leading troops of the 13th and 95th Brigades were already approaching the line on the east of the forest to which they had originally been directed. Major-General Stephens therefore requested to be allowed to hold this line. As the enemy's efforts against the Robecq—Calonne line appeared to have slackened and the attack

¹ The transport of the division, marching by road, had not arrived, but the field companies obtained a good supply of picks and shovels on the way up, as well as a certain amount of barbed wire, from a dump, and sent them forward by lorry. The machine-gun battalion of the 5th Division had not yet been formed, so the machine guns remained under battalion control.

² An excellent line had been constructed here by the First Army in the summer of 1915.

west of Merville was not being pressed, General Horne agreed. At 5.15 p.m. a First Army order was issued giving permission to hold the forward line. Arrangements had already been made to do so by the men on the spot: the 13th and 95th Brigades, under Br.-General Jones's directions, had established contact in the forest before debouching from it in a continuous line, and had then gained touch with the 61st Divn on the right and the 4th Guards Bde on the left. At 8.30 p.m. the XI. Corps, with some minor changes of boundaries, approved of the dispositions; further the 50th Dn was attached to the 5th Division and its brigades assembled at La Motte.

The 5th Division received some shell fire and some aeroplane bombs, but met with little opposition in its advance, except on the right, where the 15/R. Warwickshire (13th Brigade) had encountered the enemy holding some brickfields at Le Corbie (on the Lys, south of the front edge of Nieppe Forest). These were captured by 6 p.m., and an enemy counter-attack against them at 8 p.m., by which hour the divisional artillery had come into action, was repulsed. But, owing to heavy machine-gun fire from the southern bank of the Lys, where the Germans had pushed further west than they had on the northern, the right flank of the 5th Division was withdrawn twelve hundred yards. Indeed the pressure near the Lys grew so great that at 6.15 p.m. Major-General Mackenzie (61st Divn) was preparing to swing his left back to St. Venant during the night.¹ In the meantime the space between the canal and the 15/R. Warwickshire was filled after dark by the 2/K.O.S.B. (13th Brigade).

The XI. Corps front, therefore, still extended from Robecq (inclusive) to the "Pont Tournant" on the Bourre, thence in front of Arrewage to L'Epinette, the right flank of the 4th Guards Bde. It was held by the 61st Divn, with the 51st Dn attached, and the 5th Division with the 50th Dn attached. During the night the 5th Division constructed a series of section strongpoints and put up a certain amount of wire. The direct road to Hazebrouck through Nieppe Forest was for the moment securely blocked. This satisfactory result may be largely ascribed to the fact that the 5th Division had been used as a whole to check the enemy's onrush, and not frittered away in patching up the front.

North of the Berquins road, the battle did not go so

¹ He abandoned his idea on hearing of the First Army order fixing the line to be held.

well. During the 12th April an enormous dent, five miles wide and nearly three miles deep was made in the right and centre of the XV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle), whose eight-mile front was held by the 29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley), less the 88th Brigade; by the 31st Divn (Major-General R. J. Bridgford), less the 4th Guards Bde; and by the 34th Divn (Major-General C. L. Nicholson) with the 74th, 88th and 147th Bdes attached. The 40th Dn, pulled out for rest, was in reserve near Strazeele. Against this front, six German divisions were employed, their principal effort being made by a fresh division, the *81st Reserve*, against the 86th Brigade. The country is dead flat nearly up to the line Hazebrouck—Strazeele—Merris—Bailleul—Neuve Eglise, to which from the north low spurs run down from the Mont des Cats—Mont Rouge—Kemmel summits. It is intersected by dykes and thick hedges, with many scattered cottages and small farms, and it was, therefore, on the whole, favourable to an attacker, particularly when fresh troops were engaged against tired troops, and reliance was placed upon methods of infiltration and enfilade fire—both most effective against inexperienced troops—rather than on direct assault. To remedy the situation all available engineers, after collecting infantry stragglers, were employed in marking out new lines to be held, and in converting ruins and enclosures into strongpoints or machine-gun nests.

Without any preliminary bombardment, but covered by intense machine-gun and rifle fire, the enemy attack began between 7 and 8 A.M. Entering Douliou, the Germans were able to enfilade the lines of the 86th Brigade (Br.-General G. R. H. Cheape) and 92nd Bde (Br.-General O. de L. Williams) to the south and north, whilst at the same time they pushed back the right flank of the 87th Brigade (Br.-General G. H. N. Jackson) from the Berquins road, where there was a gap. They were thus able to advance up the line of the Meteren Becque between the 86th and 92nd. Near Ferme du Bois they penetrated between the 92nd and the 93rd Bdes (Br.-General S. C. Taylor), and, always seeking to use enfilade fire, inflicted serious losses.¹ Little ground, however, was lost until between 10 and 11 A.M. It was not in fact until about noon, after considerable casualties had been sustained and the line had become

¹ The 92nd and 93rd Bdes were supported by the 57th Division artillery (which had been covering the 31st Divn), with the LXIV. Army Field Brigade and 45th Heavy Battery.

very thin, that an unhurried retirement from hedge to hedge was begun; the 1/R. Guernsey L.I., the right of the 86th Brigade, held on to its ground until about 1.30 P.M. Enfiladed or driven from one line to another, the four brigades, swinging to the west, by 6.30 P.M. stood on a front from Vieux Berquin, where the right was in touch with the 4th Guards Bde, northward to Merris (exclusive). The 86th and 87th Bdes could now muster between them only 11 officers and 352 other ranks and two battalions of the 92nd could only collect 50 men in all. The line was therefore strengthened by the 221st and 223rd Field Companies R.E. and by the 92nd and 93rd Composite Battalions.¹ Fortunately the night proved to be quiet, since the reinforcement, the 1st Australian Division, which was being sent to the XV. Corps, was not yet in a position to develop much strength; in fact, before midnight only two and a quarter battalions had arrived.

It had been intended that the greater part of the 1st Australian Division (Major-General Sir H. Walker) should leave Amiens for Hazebrouck on the night of the 11th/12th, and the 1st Australian Brigade and most of the 2nd reached Amiens during the afternoon; but German long-range guns shelled the station yard, and aeroplanes dropped bombs near by, which not only caused casualties among the Australians, but also resulted in the flight of the French railway staff, though the British engine-drivers remained. The journey of the 1st Australian Division illustrates the difficulties likely to be experienced in the movement of troops in a restricted area such as that in which the British Armies in Flanders were now penned. The trains started from Amiens many hours late, and their passage northwards was further delayed by an air attack on St. Pol station, a few men of the 1st Australian Battalion being wounded. Thus, although the headquarters of the 1st Australian Division and of the 1st Australian Brigade, with some details, reached Hondeghe (2 miles north of Hazebrouck) at daybreak on the 12th, the next train carrying three companies of the 7th Battalion did not arrive until 2 P.M.; and it was dusk before the two following trains, with the 8th and 3rd Battalions, appeared.

Major-General Walker and his staff, travelling by car, reached Second Army headquarters at Cassel on the after-

¹ These battalions were made up of details, a few machine guns of the 29th and 31st Machine-Gun Battalions, the 92nd and 93rd Trench Mortar Batteries, and 800 stragglers of four divisions.

noon of the 11th, where it was explained to them by General Plumer that he intended to keep the division in reserve, disposing it to defend Hazebrouck, the brigades being allotted to areas around the town. In the crisis on the 12th, the XV. Corps asked General Plumer that the 1st Australian Division should not wait until its brigades were concentrated, but should send the troops to their areas as they arrived, battalion by battalion. The three companies of the 7th Battalion, subsequently reinforced by the 2nd Field Company Australian Engineers, and the 2nd Australian Machine-Gun Company, therefore, were hurried south-eastwards at 5 P.M. through the northern part of Nieppe Forest to hold the whole front of its brigade behind the 95th Brigade (5th Division). The 8th Battalion began to detrain at Hazebrouck at 7 P.M., and by 1 A.M. was established behind the 4th Guards Bde. The first company of the 3rd Battalion went to Strazeele, where it arrived at 6.30 P.M., to find there the 40th Dn, some two thousand men in all, and it took position behind the 92nd Bde; but the rest of the battalion, travelling by lorry after detraining, did not arrive until midnight. Later, the 4th Battalion came up on its left; so by daylight the thin line of Australians, four battalions with one machine-gun company covering twelve thousand yards, was in position about half a mile to a mile behind the front line of the 5th Division, and 29th and 31st Divns. Behind them the survivors of the 50th Dn were assembled at La Motte au Bois.

On the left of the ever-increasing gap occasioned by the gradual retirement of the four brigades of the 29th and 31st Divns, the six brigades under Major-General C. L. Nicholson (34th Divn) managed to maintain their position in spite of heavy onslaughts,¹ both the right and left being specially attacked. In the early part of the day the enemy actually penetrated behind the 1/5th York & Lancaster on the right, but suddenly desisted from further effort, so that the battalion held its place until withdrawn at 9 P.M. On the left, about 4 P.M., the 1/2nd Monmouthshire (pioneers of the 29th Divn, attached to the 88th Bde), which had been ordered to hold its ground at all costs, being cut off, lost 11 officers and 475 other ranks, and was reduced to four officers and 150 other ranks. It was only with great difficulty that the 1/Newfoundland Regiment, the 88th

¹ 74th and 88th in front line, 101st, 102nd and 103rd in support, 147th in reserve east of Bailleul.

Bde reserve, reinforced later by the 22nd and 23/Northumberland Fusiliers from the 102nd Bde, succeeded in checking the enemy's advance.

On the right, the gradual retirement of the 92nd and 93rd Bdes found Br.-General Gore (101st Bde), under Major-General Nicholson's directions, prepared to deal with the situation. At daybreak he had warned his battalions to be ready to form an east-west flank behind a small stream, and at 9 A.M. they were sent into position. At 12.15 P.M. Br.-General C. G. Lewes (147th Bde) began to extend this flank further west, to the southern outskirts of Bailleul, with two battalions; but, as formed bodies of Germans, with cavalry (probably artillery patrols), were seen in the distance moving west, and the new flank was being subjected to constant small attacks, at 2.30 P.M. Br.-General J. G. Chaplin (103rd Bde) sent the 9/Northumberland Fusiliers to prolong the line, and Br.-General Lewes, uneasy about his right—for rumours had reached him that an enemy mounted patrol had entered Bailleul—despatched his last battalion to occupy the town. It was past 5 P.M. before these movements were completed, and almost at once a serious attack was made against the long flank; but only near the junction of the 101st and 147th Bdes, just south of Bailleul, did the enemy gain even a slight success by forcing back the line a couple of hundred yards.

Between Bailleul, now the right of the 34th Divn, and the left flank of the 31st Divn, which had fallen back on Merris, there yawned a three-mile gap; but the 19th Brigade (Br.-General C. R. G. Mayne) and the machine guns of the 33rd Division were at hand to fill it.¹ This brigade, with the 11th and 222nd Field Companies R.E., the 18/Middlesex (Pioneers) and the 33rd Machine-Gun Battalion (less two companies) had spent the night at Meteren, a village situated on a hill due north of the gap, where also divisional headquarters had been established.

From 9.30 A.M. onwards Major-General R. J. Pinney, the divisional commander, besides seeing the usual stragglers and civilian fugitives, received information of the gradual retirement of the 31st Divn, and the advance of the enemy against Meteren from the south-east. At 10.30 A.M. he therefore sent forward the remaining two companies of the machine-gun battalion under Lieut.-Colonel G. S. Hutchi-

¹ The artillery brigades of the 33rd Division were sent on the 12th from Ypres to support the 19th Brigade, but the C.R.A. (Br.-General C. G. Stewart) remained with divisional headquarters.

son—the first eight guns, with their crews, being packed into a lorry, forcibly appropriated, and hurried forward—to establish contact with the enemy. After occupying a line about a mile south of the village, the machine gunners were able to keep off the Germans and rally the returning troops.¹ In addition, Major-General Pinney sent orders at 1 P.M. to Br.-General Mayne, whose brigade was standing by at 10-minutes' notice to move, for one battalion to occupy Hill 40, about 1½ miles south of Meteren, so as to cover the village on the south and south-east. The 1/Queen's, which left at 1.15 P.M., was unable to reach the line selected by the brigadier, as it was already occupied by the Germans with machine guns. The battalion was indeed driven back, but by 3 P.M. it had settled down in the line of the machine-gun battalion. By that time, part of the 9th Cyclist Battalion, sent by Lieut.-General Gordon (IX. Corps), had arrived, bringing a message that the enemy was to be stopped at all costs. Br.-General Mayne used the cyclists to extend the line to the eastward, and moved another battalion (5/Scottish Rifles) to occupy a trench being dug by the engineers and pioneers east of Meteren. Patrols of the 5/Scottish Rifles established touch with the 34th Divn troops near Bailleul and also contact with the enemy south of Bailleul.

At 1 P.M. Major-General Pinney had been placed in charge of the line west of Bailleul, while his troops were augmented by the 255th Tunnelling Company R.E., the 22nd Cyclist Battalion, and the 2nd New Zealand Entrenching Battalion; the 1/Scottish Rifles, the last battalion of the 19th Brigade, was then sent to the right. The machine-gun battalion covered the front with its guns in small groups, and to make sure of the supply of ammunition, its transport galloped along the line depositing boxes. At 3.30 P.M., Major-General Pinney was put in "tactical control" and administrative command of the 34th Divn, and 25th and 19th Dns, in addition to his own division. Finally, in spite of interruptions from the enemy and the absence of any artillery support except one anti-aircraft gun, the gaps on either side of the 19th Brigade were filled. At 11 P.M., Meteren church and adjoining buildings were on fire, illuminating the country for miles round. Major-General Pinney was thereby able to report that the brigade and attached troops were in touch with the divisions on either flank, although on the

¹ For this and its action on the succeeding days until 19th April the 33rd Battalion Machine-Gun Corps received a "Record" from the IX. Corps (see page 212, f.n. 1).

right there was a gap of about six hundred yards ; further, that the Germans were entrenching in small posts all along his front. The 33rd Division, as it was said, had " played " full back to forwards who had been worsted in a scrum-
" mage " ; according to all accounts, it was the resolute handling of its machine-gun battalion which contributed most to holding the Germans back from Meteren.

Map 18. The short front, a little over four miles long, of the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Gordon), whose headquarters were now at St. Sylvestre Cappel ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Hazebrouck), extended from Nieppe, on to the forward slopes of the Neuve Eglise rise, and then to the forward slopes of the Wulverghem spur almost to Wytschaete. This was held by a mixture of brigades and units of five different divisions : the 75th Be of the 25th Dn, with one battalion of the 56th Be (19th Dn) and the divisional pioneers attached ; two battalions of the 100th Brigade (33rd Division) ; two battalions of the 148th Bde (49th Divn) ; and the 57th Be of the 19th Dn, with the 108th Be of the 36th Dn attached. In reserve were the 7th Be (less in strength than a battalion), the 98th Brigade (33rd Division) and one battalion of the 56th Be. Around Mount Kemmel was assembled a body of nine hundred troops, called the Kemmel Defence Force.¹

Against this mixed array of mostly very tired men, more than four German divisions (*214th, 36th Reserve, 31st and 49th Reserve*, and part of the *17th Reserve*) made singularly little impression. Waiting for artillery to come up, not even sniping except against the right, they made no attack until 2 P.M., when a move was made against the 75th Be (Br.-General C. C. Hannay), which during the next two hours, though supported by the last reserve of the 100th Brigade, was forced to fall back nearly a mile. The 100th Brigade (Br.-General A. W. F. Baird) acted offensively and sent out two strong patrols, which kept the Germans back until late in the afternoon, so that only a fire fight ensued. The 148th Bde was left in peace until 4 P.M., when it was heavily shelled, but no infantry attack was delivered against it until 8.45 P.M., when it fell back slowly, continu-

¹ 19/Lancashire Fusiliers (Pioneers), 550 ; 456th Field Company R.E., 100, with 80 men of the 1/5th, 1/6th and 1/7th West Yorkshire (146th Bde) attached ; D Company 49th Machine-Gun Battalion, 127 ; and 146th Trench Mortar Company, 57 ; total, 914, under Lieut.-Colonel H. D. Bousfield, West Yorkshire Regiment (T.F.), recently returned after being wounded, and not yet posted to a battalion.

ing the retirement at 2 A.M. to the Green Line. The centre of the 100th Brigade finally remained in its morning position, with its wings thrown back to keep touch with the troops of the 75th Be and 148th Bde on the right and left.

On the other hand, further north, the 57th Be (Br.-General T. A. Cubitt) and the attached 108th and S. African Bes, held their ground, recovering by counter-attack what was lost in an attack at 6.40 P.M., so that a gap of twelve hundred yards opened between them and the 148th Bde. To fill this Major-General Jeffreys sent the 94th Field Company R.E. and a company of the 10/Worcestershire (57th Be) to join the 8/Gloucestershire, which was in support; but these troops were too few to do more than cover the gap.

During the day, the reserves of the IX. Corps were moved slightly to conform to the changing situation. The 7th Be, with the three field companies R.E. and 12 machine guns, was shifted over towards Bailleul; the 98th Brigade, under the 19th Dn, was ordered at 8 A.M. from Dranoutre eastward to the Green Line behind the 57th Be to be ready to counter-attack. It arrived there at 1 P.M., but, in consequence of the situation at Meteren, at 2.50 P.M. was sent to rejoin the 33rd Division, and then ordered back six miles to St. Jans Cappel (2 miles north of Bailleul), which it reached at 7.30 P.M. Later it was moved south for the defence of Bailleul. The 178th Bde (59th Divn), from VIII. Corps reserve west of Ypres, arrived at La Clytte ($1\frac{3}{4}$ miles north-west of Kemmel) at 3 P.M. and was placed at the disposal of Major-General Jeffreys (19th Dn). He moved it towards Kemmel, and arrangements were then made to relieve the S. African Be; but, in view of the situation on the front south of the 57th Be, he eventually decided to keep the brigade in support. In order to ensure that the long front under the 19th Dn, occupied by the remnants of several brigades, should be held as a whole without a gap, he appointed Br.-General T. A. Cubitt (57th Be) as "co-ordinating brigadier", an appointment in which he was retained until the 19th, his command being popularly known as the "XXXIII. Corps".

Thus, although the front of the IX. Corps became very irregular during the 12th April, and a gap had been opened on the left where the 148th Bde had fallen back, no penetration by the enemy took place, and reserves were at hand in case of need.

The Royal Air Force rendered splendid service on the

12th. Throughout the day the advancing German divisions were subjected to relentless attacks by the British air squadrons, and every unit was used unsparingly from 6 A.M. to 7 P.M., from dawn to dark. "More hours were flown, more bombs dropped, and more photographs taken than on any day since the War began."¹ The main weight of the I. Brigade (First Army) and II. Brigade (Second Army) was directed to stemming the advance towards Hazebrouck. In the early morning low-flying and bombing attacks were widespread, but from about 9 A.M. onward they were concentrated on Merville, Neuf Berquin, Estaires and the roads leading into them; the progress of the battle was also reported hour by hour. Air fighting was continuous, but German low-flying aircraft were less active than on the first three days of the battle. Six German balloons were destroyed. During the night bombing squadrons attacked targets in the battlefield, billeting areas, including Bapaume, and the railway junctions, including Don and Douai, behind the enemy front.

In spite of the constant retirements of parts of the line, thanks to the exertions of the stretcher-bearers and field ambulance personnel, most of the wounded were got away.

Maps 13, 14. The movements for shortening the line of the Second Army were begun on this day. The orders issued by General Plumer on the 11th April² involved a withdrawal of the main forces of the XXII., VIII. and II. Corps to the front line of the Battle Zone (Army Line): the Forward Zone was no longer to be held as the main line of resistance, but only as an outpost line. It was intended that the retirement should be made gradually—the artillery being withdrawn first—whilst the occupation of the Battle Zone would be carried out simultaneously by corps. At midday on the 12th, however, the VIII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston), which had begun moving its artillery back during the night of the 11th/12th, ordered the withdrawal of the infantry to begin during the forthcoming night. Accordingly, the 59th Divn (less the 178th Bde attached to the 19th Dn) was withdrawn to Potijze, and thence by train to Brandhoek, five miles west of Ypres, being replaced in the Forward Zone by a portion of the 41st Divn (VIII. Corps), another portion manning the front line of the Battle Zone.³

¹ "The War in the Air" Vol. IV., p. 381.

² See page 245.

³ The 59th Divn was transferred to the IX. Corps early on 13th April,

Before a copy of the VIII. Corps orders had reached the headquarters of the II. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Jacob), on the left, the latter had issued its own. After notifying that the retirement of the heavy batteries had been begun on the night of the 11th/12th, these orders required arrangements to be made so that the withdrawal to the front of the Battle Zone could, if necessary, be carried out by the 36th and 30th Divns, which held the II. Corps front, during the night of the 14th/15th; the occupation of the Battle Zone should be completed by the support brigades by 6 A.M. on the 14th; but that unless the situation demanded it, the movement of the rest of infantry would not take place until the following night. The arrival of the VIII. Corps orders necessitated a revision of those issued by the II. Corps, and at 10.15 P.M. fresh instructions were sent out. The Battle Zone was to be occupied by the support brigade by 6 A.M. on the following morning (18th), by which hour also—or as soon afterwards as practicable—the reduction of the troops in the Forward Zone was to be finished.

The XXII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley), on the right of the VIII. Corps, issued orders at 6.30 A.M. on the 12th for the artillery movements to be made gradually to the positions covering the Battle Zone defences, and to be ended, if possible, by the night of the 12th/13th April.

Divisional commanders were instructed by all corps to continue to hold the Forward Zone and to make no change that would give the enemy any indication of weakness and provoke attack. Troops in the Forward Zone were to defend it stubbornly, and not withdraw unless forced to do so; but reserves were to be so disposed and employed as to allow the Battle Zone to be strongly held.

At 8 A.M. on the 13th April, the II. Corps took over the 41st Divn, now holding—after the withdrawal of the 59th Divn into reserve—the whole front of the VIII. Corps whose headquarters then became available to take charge of the Second Army reserves. All these movements were carried out without interference from the enemy, and were reported as completed at 10 A.M. on the 13th.

At midday on the 12th, M. Clemenceau, accompanied by M. Loucheur, his Minister of Munitions, had an interview

the 34th with attached brigades, together with the command of the front held, having been handed from the XV. to the IX. Corps at 6 P.M. on the previous evening.

with Sir Douglas Haig. Earlier he had paid a visit to General Horne (First Army). He was anxious about the safety of the Bruay coal mines. After assuring him that every possible measure would be taken to protect them, the Commander-in-Chief took the opportunity to draw the French Prime Minister's attention to the gravity of the military situation, and the urgent need that General Foch should send some relief to the northern flank of the British Armies. His policy, he explained, had always been at all costs to keep in touch with the French Armies, and he could not therefore reduce his forces between the French left flank and Arras—where he had eight divisions plus six in reserve—or between Arras and the La Bassée canal—where there were four divisions plus one in reserve. He emphasized that he had no general reserve except exhausted divisions reorganizing near the coast, and the 52nd Division from Palestine, which was due to begin disembarking on this very day. General Plumer was making preparations, always keeping in touch on the right with the First Army, to withdraw slightly, shortening his front; but he might hold on to the Pilkem line if reinforced: the pressing need was to reinforce the British: he therefore hoped that the move of French divisions from the Somme might be hastened, that the Dunkirk area might be inundated, and that French and American troops might be sent to the St. Omer—Dunkirk line to support the Second Army. M. Clemenceau, who knew that assistance had been refused, said that matters must be settled by the “normal hierarchic channels, that is General Foch”.¹

At 12.45 P.M. G.H.Q. informed General Foch that, in view of the enemy pressure on the right of the Second Army, General Plumer had been authorized to withdraw his left to the Pilkem ridge, leaving outposts in the front line on Passchendaele ridge, and that the Belgians had been asked to conform.

¹ “Le Ministère Clemenceau”, by General Mordacq, i. p. 295.

So little did General Mordacq, who was Chief of M. Clemenceau's Military Cabinet, understand the situation that he told him that the British wanted shaking up, that defending the ground foot by foot was not enough. “To stop such an attack, they must manoeuvre, organize counter-attacks, prepare positions on which to retire, of all of which I see nothing.” Even if he were right, reserves are required for such purposes, and Sir D. Haig had not got them.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH ON THE 12TH APRIL¹

During the morning of the 12th, General Foch took all the necessary measures to support the British First and Second Armies by the Inter-Allied Reserves.

Behind the troops of General Plumer he hastened to constitute a solid Franco-Belgian "groupement" as soon as possible. The French II. Cavalry Corps received the order to reach the region St. Omer on the 13th; there it would be joined by two divisions, the 133rd (already in the process of transport towards Bergues) and a division to be provided by General Pétain. [The 28th Division was on its way from Lorraine to Bergues by rail, where it arrived on the 13th-14th.] At the same time, General Foch telegraphed to the Chief of the General Staff of the Belgian Army:

"On account of the German advance in the direction of Hazebrouck, which may become dangerous for the Allied forces further north, I consider it necessary to constitute, under the orders of General Plumer, a groupement of all the forces available to stop the progress of the enemy either towards the north or towards the west.

"For this purpose, I request you to put at the disposal of General Plumer any Belgian forces which are not indispensable for holding the front; that is, probably, about two divisions and two cavalry divisions.

"The French forces which are beginning to detrain in the region of Dunkirk—Bergues will similarly be put under the orders of General Plumer. . . ."

The Governor of Dunkirk was requested to form [fresh water] inundations from the Furnes—Dunkirk road to St. Omer, so as to put any enemy advance towards Dunkirk and Calais out of the question.

The British First Army was in a much less difficult position than the Second; it could be easily supported by the British and French general reserves; General Foch simply insisted on Field-Marshal Haig sending the British Cavalry Corps as soon as possible to the neighbourhood of Aire "so as to be able to assist the troops of that area in stopping the march of the Germans in the direction of Hazebrouck".

Having thus arranged for the direct support of the two threatened Armies, General Foch began to consider how he could further liberate the British reserves, so that they could then be moved towards the battle, whilst the French forces would be held ready to intervene between the Somme and Arras. For this purpose, he hastened still further the general movement of the reserves constituted by General Pétain towards the north.

The Tenth Army (General Maistre) was to reach the line Doullens—Vauchelles with the heads of its columns on the 13th; as soon as it entered the British zone, it would receive orders direct from General Foch. The Fifth Army (General Micheler), reinforced by drawing

¹ Abbreviated translation from F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 441-7.

on the G.A.R., was to follow without delay behind General Maistre's Army. General Foch then asked General Pétain to send a part of the Groupement de l'Oise to the right bank of the river as soon as possible and to despatch the I. Cavalry Corps to the Aumale region. General Fayolle himself would place his reserves behind his northern wing, so as to be in a position to support the British Fourth Army if it were attacked between the Luce and the Somme.

General Foch then issued his Directive for the conduct of the battle in progress in the British zone. The enemy should be stopped :

Map 13.

"In the south by the progressive occupation of the line Béthune—St. Omer, front to the north-east.

"In the north, by the progressive occupation of the general line, Mount Kemmel—Cassel, face to the south.

"Between these two lines—which are to be held at all cost and which will dam the enemy's advance—the troops must slow down this advance and then stop it in front by the occupation, facing east, of successive points d'appui which the country affords. These points d'appui must be previously pointed out to the troops which are to occupy them and, if it is possible, be organized by them. These successive lines will be :

"(a) Line Bailleul—Nieppe Forest ;

"(b) Heights of Berthen, Caestre, Hazebrouck, Aire ;

"(c) Cassel, Ebblinghem ;

"(d) Cassel, Forest of Clairmarais."

The French II. Cavalry Corps, put at the disposal of General Plumer, should be employed in the spirit of these instructions, in particular to ensure liaison between the British First and Second Armies.

At the same time on the 12th, General Foch sent Colonel Desticker of his Staff as liaison officer to the headquarters of the British Second Army ; he instructed this officer to bring to the notice of General Plumer how he viewed the situation and the measures which should be applied to meet it ; on the following day he himself explained to General Horne the Directive given to G.H.Q. in order to stop the enemy's thrust towards Hazebrouck.

The 138rd Divn, still not completely reconstituted, finished detrainning during the 12th and following days in the region of Bergues ; . . . the II. Cavalry Corps began its march towards the north at midday on the 12th ; after having crossed the Somme between Picquigny and Abbeville during the night, its 2nd and 6th Divisions were billeted astride the Authie, on either side of the Abbeville—St. Pol road, its 3rd Division south-east of Abbeville towards Ailly le Haut Clocher.

NOTE II

THE GERMANS ON THE 12TH APRIL

Map 18.
Sketch
20.

In the orders issued by the *Sixth Army* on the evening of the 11th April the objectives given for the 12th were again the high ground near Bailleul, Meteren and Strazeele, the northern and western edges of Nieppe Forest and the Aire—La Bassée canal between Guarbecque ($4\frac{1}{2}$ miles south-east of Aire) and Mont Bernenchon.

The orders issued by the *Fourth Army* directed the *XVIII.*

Reserve Corps (Messines—Wytschaete sector) to confine itself to holding the positions it had captured until the *X. Reserve Corps* (between the Armentières—Bailleul road and the Douve) could gain more ground with its left, which was to be strongly reinforced. The attack of this corps was to be directed against Neuve Eglise, and was to be supported by all available batteries which could fire on the area south of the Douve.

These orders met with Crown Prince Rupprecht's approval. He regarded the thrust against Godewaersvelde and Hazebrouck as the most important matter, but he had every intention, as soon as circumstances rendered it feasible, of launching an attack against the Ypres Salient. This attack would be made by the *Guard Corps* of the "Ypres Group" and the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* of the *Fourth Army*, from Houthulst Forest in the north and from Kemmel in the south, with the object of cutting off the British troops in the Salient.

On the evening of the 10th April, Crown Prince Rupprecht had enquired of the *Fourth Army* if it would not be possible to undertake a bigger operation from the direction of Houthulst Forest, which should include part of the Belgian front, since conditions there had become more favourable. The Ypres Salient appeared to be held by exhausted British divisions only. The *Fourth Army* had replied that, in order to carry out an attack in the direction of Bixschoote three more divisions, as well as artillery, would be required; but finally it had agreed that one fresh division, which was being sent, would be sufficient. Crown Prince Rupprecht's view was that, even if it were open to question whether an attack from the direction of Houthulst Forest would achieve far-reaching results, it would, in any case, ease the situation considerably on the present front of attack of the *Fourth Army*, where, up to midday on the 11th April, no striking results had been achieved or, at any rate, no reports of such successes had reached his headquarters.

The accounts of the fighting which are available are very brief: *Sixth Army*: After hard fighting, the Army reached a line which ran west of Le Romarin—southern edge of Bailleul—southern edge of Merris—Vieux Berquin—Calonne—Locon. From Locon to the La Bassée canal there was no change. Considerable progress had been made, but the troops had not yet reached the objectives given for the 11th April, and west of Merville were unable to hold all the ground they had won.

Fourth Army: The *XVIII. Reserve Corps* received news of a withdrawal in front of its left flank (which was not the case), and, in spite of the orders to stand fast, followed up as far as the eastern edge of Wulverghem (not within half-a-mile of Wulverghem). Further to the south, the *X. Reserve Corps* made slight progress beyond the line Ploegsteert Wood—Le Romarin. During the morning, Ludendorff informed the *Fourth Army* that the *Sixth Army* had reached Nieppe, and emphasized the necessity of "mopping up" Ploegsteert Wood (it was already in German hands) as soon as possible. He also gave instructions that the *Fourth Army* was to concentrate its efforts on reaching the high ground at Neuve Eglise. At 1.15 p.m., the headquarters of the *Fourth Army*, under the impression that the British were preparing to hold from Wytschaete to Kemmel, or from Kemmel to St. Eloi,¹ gave orders for the immediate capture of the high ground

¹ Both these premises were wrong. The British had withdrawn to the line Neuve Eglise—Wulverghem—Wytschaete.

about Neuve Eglise—Wulverghem—Wytschaete, whence infantry was to be pushed forward to cover the concentration of artillery in preparation for an attack on Kemmel.¹ Orders were also issued to the *Guard Corps* to make preparations for an attack, in the direction of Bixschoote, against the British in the Ypres Salient: for this purpose, two divisions and four heavy batteries would be sent as reinforcements. The attack, when delivered, was to be in conjunction with one by the left wing of the Army.

By evening, the *Fourth Army* was on the line Hollebeke—east edge of Wytschaete—east edge of Wulverghem—Le Romarin.

According to the Army diary, the Germans had seen no indications during the day of the withdrawal of the British from their advanced positions in the Ypres Salient, although early in the morning small bodies of infantry had been seen moving from Zonnebeke and St. Julien south-westwards on Ypres. Crown Prince Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff (Kuhl) informed the *Fourth Army* that if a withdrawal from the Salient were begun the attack by the "*Ypres Group*" should be launched immediately. He added that the method of attacking Kemmel must depend on the results of the operations of the 13th April: to get west of Kemmel it would be necessary to capture Mont Rouge, and if the British held the line Mont Rouge—Kemmel, the attack would necessarily have to be made in stages.

The following is an extract from Crown Prince Rupprecht's diary for the 12th April:

"As regards the *Fourth Army*, the greater part of Wytschaete has now been captured and consequently our grip on the high ground north of the Douve made secure. We have also crossed the valley of the Steenebeke west of Messines. In my opinion, the projected attack, on the 20th April by the *Second Army*, should only take place if the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* make further progress, as we hope.² If, however, these two Armies are brought to a standstill, it would be better for the *Second Army* to do nothing and keep all its available forces ready for a fresh blow on a large scale by the *Seventeenth Army*.³ The most important thing of all is to exhaust the British completely in order to bring about their final collapse. Major Wetzell, the Chief of the Operations Section, agrees with this view, while Ludendorff seems to prefer a series of smaller attacks. These will only result in smaller successes—although with proportionately higher casualties—than large attacks. Moreover, in these smaller attacks the expenditure of ammunition is relatively greater than in larger attacks, owing to the necessity of protecting the flanks; and the continued regrouping of the artillery entails much work, and fatigues men and horses very much. Ludendorff is certainly a wonderful organizer,

¹ During the morning, Ludendorff had pointed out that the attack on Kemmel would be difficult and should be carried out from either east or west, and not from the south.

² This was an attack to be made to gain the line Foulloy—Cachy—Domart (south of Amiens), as its possession was considered essential to safeguard the right of the *LI. Corps*, the left corps of the *Second Army*. It was then hoped that concentrated shelling against the flank and rear of the troops holding the sector between the Somme and the Ancre would cause them to evacuate it.

³ The *Seventeenth Army* was next on the north to the *Second Army*.

“but not a great strategist. The greatest result of to-day’s fighting by the *Sixth Army* is that the divisions of the *II. Bavarian Corps* and *XIX. Corps* have succeeded in establishing themselves south of Bailleul, Meteren and Merris on the edge of the high ground. Meteren is reported to be fortified. The *LV. Corps* (Robecq—Merville sector) has also made appreciable progress and its *8th Bavarian Reserve Division* has nearly reached Nieppe Forest; the remaining troops of the corps are on a line from east of St. Floris to north-east of Mont Bernenchon.”

General von Kuhl, Crown Prince Rupprecht’s Chief of the Staff, had been summoned to O.H.L. at Avesnes, and on his return reported to Crown Prince Rupprecht “that Ludendorff wished the attack by the *Second Army* to capture the line Fouilloy—Cachy—Domart to be carried through in order to improve the local conditions and, above all, those south of the Luce”. The diary goes on: “He also attaches importance to getting as close to Amiens as possible; therefore the western bank of the Avre must not be evacuated and held only as an outpost position, as the *Eighteenth Army* wished to do. Moreover, preparations are to be made for another attack later by the right flank of the *Second* and the left flank of the *Eighteenth Army*.”

“Thus apparently Ludendorff is meditating an offensive north of the Somme if that of the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* does not result in any great success. However, if an advance is to be made with its left flank north of the Somme, we must not get involved in any large operations south of that river, otherwise there will not be sufficient fresh forces for the main operation. Any preparations for an attack north of the Somme can at present only be theoretical, for labour as well as batteries is lacking, and the troops in reserve in rear of the *Sixth Army* must be ready to move northwards for employment with the *Sixth* and *Fourth Armies*. In any case, valuable time will be lost if we launch a partial attack with the *Second Army* south of the Somme, and only after that take in hand real preparations for an attack north of the river. Meanwhile, it certainly appears as if we could still keep the offensive of the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* going.”

According to the observation of British prisoners, the Germans were in serious transport difficulties owing to artillery fire, bombing, and congestion on the few roads available; the regimental transport consisted of anything from a landau to a hand-barrow, the condition of the horses was dreadful, and there was no sign of march discipline.

NOTE III

A GERMAN ACCOUNT OF THE BREAK-THROUGH AT PACAUT ON 12TH APRIL 1918

Translated from the account kindly furnished by Lieut.-Colonel Maps Wolfgang Foerster, Director of the *Forschungsanstalt für Kriegs- und Heeresgeschichte*.

On the evening of the 11th the infantry of the *16th Division*, after severe fighting, had reached roughly the line Le Grand Pacaut

(1 km. south of Merville)—west edge of Paradis (1 km. east of Pacaut). In the area Paradis—Pacaut the left wing of the *6/Rhineland Infantry Regiment (68th)* was engaged. The British there had received numerous reinforcements from Pacaut during the course of the afternoon of the 11th and had employed them to form a line a quarter of a mile west of the Paradis—Le Bouzateux Farm road. Paradis was under heavy artillery fire; from all angles and corners too enfilade machine-gun fire was being directed against the western edge of the village. The situation in it compelled parts of the *II.* and *III. Battalions* of the *68th Infantry Regiment* to retire. They asked in vain for heavy artillery support. Touch with the *Bavarian 1st Reserve Division* on the left could not be obtained.

At 5 p.m. both battalions received the order: as soon as the enemy resistance in any way permits the *II./68th* should advance north of Paradis and the *III./68th* south of it, leaving the hostile machine-gun nests to be mopped up later. It appears that this operation was not possible.

The divisional commander then laid great stress on the capture of Calonne that very night and he detailed the *68th Regiment* to carry it out. Meantime all attempts to regain the western edge of Paradis had completely failed. At 6.45 p.m. the *30th Infantry Brigade*, for the second time, ordered an attack on Calonne, without troubling about the recapture of Paradis. Two battalions of the *29th Infantry Regiment* were to follow behind the left wing of the *68th* and passing to the north and south of Paradis, to take it from the west.

I./68th had since the morning of 11th been billeted in La Croix Marmuse, but had there suffered very heavily from artillery fire. In the evening its companies were sent one by one towards Paradis, and at 8 p.m. the battalion bivouacked 600 yards east of the village.

On the 11th La Bouzateux Farm had held up the Germans so long that the British had been able continuously to reinforce the troops opposing the *68th Regiment* which had pushed farthest. In spite of the most heroic exertions the German objective had not been reached. The losses of the regiment had been heavy and totalled 65 killed and 105 wounded.

The night of the 11th/12th was extremely disturbed. The attack having come to a standstill, on the morning of the 12th the *16th Division* was to get it going again "cost what it may".

Zero hour for the battalions of the *68th Regiment* was fixed at 5 a.m. The *I. Battalion* was to take the place of the *III.* on the right of the front line, its left flank directed on Paradis church. In the southern part of the regimental sector, exactly opposite Pacaut, the *II. Battalion* prepared to assault. The *III. Battalion* was to follow as reserve. The objective of the attack of the division was given as Calonne.

The companies, under cover of darkness, crawled forward and succeeded in getting quite close to the enemy. At 4.45 a.m. the *I./68th* opened fire with trench mortars and rose to assault at 5 a.m. precisely. Ten minutes earlier the enemy had opened a barrage, but the whole of it fell on the main street of Paradis, that is behind the German front line. *II./68th* also assaulted.

The enemy was obviously surprised; his front line was easily overrun. A battalion staff and about 30 men were captured by *II./68th*. The enemy offered lively resistance from his rearward

machine-gun nests, but one after the other they were silenced and one strongpoint after another was taken. Pacaut was soon captured ; by 6.40 A.M. even the *III. Battalion* had passed through it. About 6.30 A.M. Quentin (2 miles west of Paradis) was also in German hands.

The attack went on without a pause. The advance was extraordinary quick the troops doing their best to keep on the heels of the retiring enemy. All hostile artillery fire had ceased and batteries were found abandoned.

The *5th Company* pressed into La Pierre au Beure : one group disarmed the men they found in an isolated farm, who turned out to be a brigade staff : a general and seven officers. Five other officers and 192 men were also taken in La Pierre au Beure.

By 8.30 A.M. the second company had occupied the western edge of La Pierre au Beure and the road which leads northwards to Baquerolles Farm. On its right a small party had reached a position 500 yards east of the Clarence river, from the far bank of which it received heavy machine-gun fire.

Farther south, Riez du Vinage was occupied by the leading men of all companies of the *I.* and *II./68th*, their total strength at midday totalling 4 officers, 4 n.c.o's and 56 men (including 3 light machine-gun crews) with 3 heavy machine guns. There were only 400 rounds left for each machine gun and only 50 for each man.

One party of the *I./68th* went even farther, right up to the houses of Carvin (on the Clarence, 1 mile N.E. of Robecq). A patrol got to the outskirts of Robecq and reported that the enemy was retiring.

In the northern part of the battlefield the renewed attack, with effective support of artillery, had led to the capture of Calonne by parts of the *II./68th*, *III./68th* and the left wing of the *28th Regiment* which had attacked via Bouzateux Farm. After lively house-to-house fighting a passage over the Clarence was achieved at 10.30 A.M. The bridge was found undamaged and about 11 A.M. the western edge of Calonne was occupied.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

13TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLE OF HAZEBROUCK (*continued*) AND THE BATTLE OF BAILLEUL

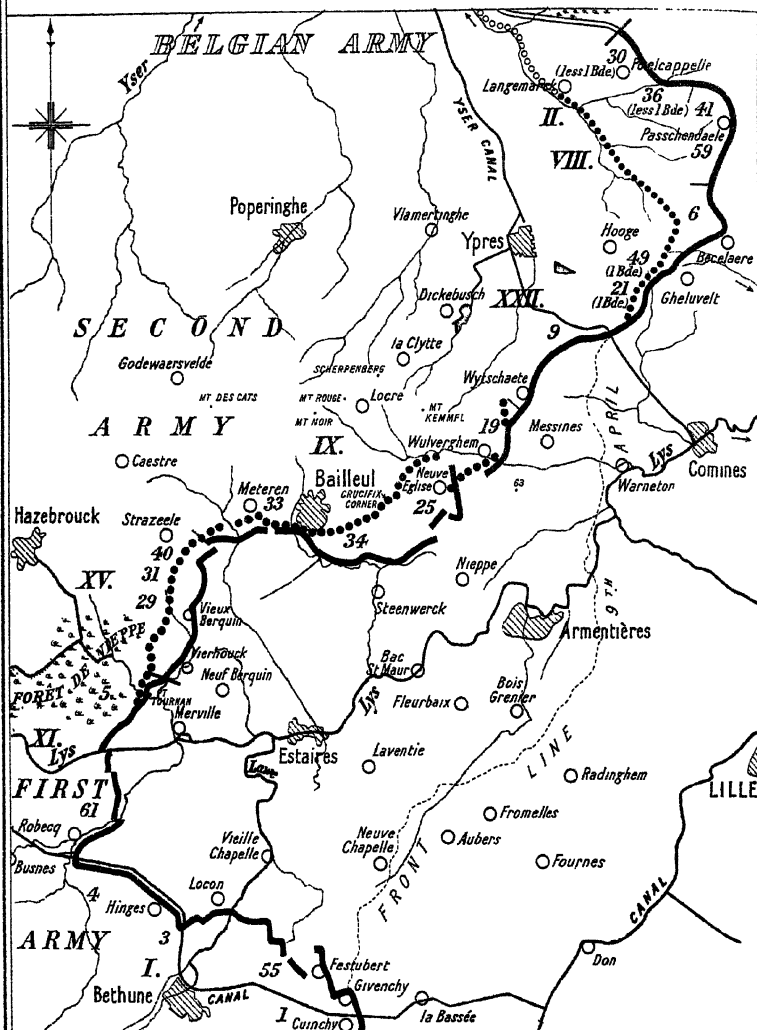
(Maps 18, 19 ; Sketches 20, 21)

Map 19. ON the 13th April, the Intelligence Branch reported that
Sketch four more enemy divisions had reached the Western Front
21. from Russia, three of which had gone to the British sector. This brought the total in the Western theatre up to 203.¹ Little happened on the right flank of the great pocket which had been made in the Allied front where the Portuguese had stood ; but the German offensive was continued with some vigour against the centre and left flank, along the 10-mile front, Robecq—Nieppe Forest—Vieux Berquin—Merris—Bailleul—Neuve Eglise. Twenty-three divisions were employed in the front line and nine in second line against 14 British divisions (four of them, the 25th, 40th, 50th and 51st, reduced to mere cadres) ; the 1st Australian Division, French 133rd Divn, one brigade of the 59th Divn and one brigade of the 6th Divn, it is true, were coming up, but they were not yet available on the field. Although enjoying about two-fold numerical superiority, the enemy made little progress, except at two places. At one of these the greater part of three divisions was massed against the 4th Guards Bde, spread over more than a four thousand yards' front covering Hazebrouck. At the other place, the greater part of four German divisions was faced only by portions of three brigades (75th Be, 100th Brigade and 148th Bde) covering Neuve Eglise.

¹ The actual number according to Kuhl and Gehre was 204 divisions and 3 brigades. The maximum was reached on 22nd May when the total was 207 divisions and 3 brigades.

Sketch 21.

THE LYS, 13TH APRIL.



REFERENCE.

Line 13th April... .. 14th April a.m.
 Army boundaries Corps boundaries

SCALE OF YARDS.

1000 0 1 2 3 4 5000 10000 15000 20000

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

The day was cold and grey; mist formed in the early morning, thick near the rivers and canals. Later on clouds prevented any flying except a few low reconnaissances and some contact patrolling, so that the troops did not obtain much support from the air. On the other hand, there was little enemy air activity, except on the part of a few low-flying battle planes. The British, on the whole, received more assistance from artillery than did the enemy, many of the German attacks being dispersed by gunfire before they materialized: owing to the difficulty of moving guns forward over the waterlogged ground and the general troubles of ammunition supply, the foe could not bring a large number of batteries into effective action. A few of his guns, however, using the cover of the hedges, were pushed forward with great gallantry to very close range, even as close as 250 yards. There is no doubt that on this day the German infantry suffered even more heavily than on any of the previous days of the battle, the result of which was to show itself clearly on the morrow.

On the front of the I. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Holland, 55th, 3rd and 4th Divns) extending from Givenchy to Robecq (exclusive), Route A Keep, captured by the Germans on the 9th April, was re-taken during the night of the 12th/13th by an attack organized by the 13/King's under direction of Br.-General Boyd-Moss (165th Bde). At intervals during the rest of the day the enemy tried to regain possession of it without success.¹ Otherwise there was no change on this front, the enemy's attempts to advance being easily defeated by fire.² At 3 p.m. Lieut.-General Holland issued orders that the 4th Divn should during the ensuing night take over from the 3rd the sector held by the 76th Bde, thus making the 4th responsible for the line along the canal from Avelette bridge, where the front line crossed the canal, as far as the corps left boundary. Later,

¹ The extemporized company employed was composed of men of the 5th, 6th, 10th and 13/King's. Its attack was preceded by an artillery "crash" lasting three minutes. The post was a veritable shambles; for it had not only changed hands four times, but repeated attacks on it had failed.

² "The attack of the 16th Division [which had won the success at "Pacaut on the previous day] between Calonne and St. Floris [that is "against the 61st Divn] soon broke down."

The attack of the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division on Robecq and Mont Bernenchon "did not take place. But the tired, worn-out troops, closely "packed together, suffered heavily from the bombs and machine guns of "enemy aeroplanes and from the enfilade fire of the enemy batteries". B.O.A., p. 486.

at 11 p.m., he issued an order for the relief of the 55th Divn by the 1st Division (relieved by the 11th Division) during the night of the 14th/15th and two subsequent nights.

Against the sector of the XI. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking), between the La Bassée canal and the Bourre, from Robecq to the "Pont Tournant", held by the 61st Divn and by the 13th Brigade and the right wing of the 95th Brigade of the 5th Division, the enemy (*16th, 8th Bavarian Reserve and 8th Divisions*) made four distinct and furious attacks. The ground was absolutely open and flat, and the XI. Corps troops had no more cover than the small trenches they could dig with the portable entrenching implement, or such cottages and hedges as stood there. The enemy's attacks were preceded by ill-directed bombardments which fell mainly on the roads and villages, La Motte au Bois chateau, 5th Division headquarters, being hit; they were however well supported by trench mortars and a few low-flying aeroplanes. All were stopped by artillery barrages and rifle fire, helped by enfilade machine-gun fire from buildings; a particularly heavy onslaught against the left of the 61st Divn near Cornet Malo, south of the Lys canal, was brought to a standstill by the 2/5th Gloucestershire, which contained in its ranks a large proportion of young soldiers just out from England. The strenuous musketry practice of the 5th Division during its quiet time on the Italian front also met with its reward, while the heavy artillery knocked out the German trench mortars.¹ Where the enemy did effect penetration between posts, he was at once expelled, and no ground was lost. Throughout the day, fighting and sniping continued among the houses along the Clarence, many of which changed hands several times; but Baquerolles Farm, on the eastern side of the river, near the left flank of the 184th Bde, remained in the hands of the 2/4th Oxford L.I., which had recaptured it on the previous day. At night, the 5th Division drew 2½ million rounds of small-arms ammunition to replace expenditure.² By dawn on the 14th,

¹ The X. Brigade R.G.A. was "affiliated" to the 5th Division. The 5th Division artillery (XV. and XXVII. Brigades R.F.A.) was reinforced during the morning by the LXXXIV. Army Brigade R.F.A.

² The failure of the *8th Bavarian Reserve Division* and *8th (Prussian) Division* is admitted, as the following extract from "Res. Regt. No. 23", pp. 173-5, shows:

"The division [*8th Bav. Reserve*] was to advance on a broad front against "Haverskerque (*Reserve Regt. No. 22*) and through the Forest of Nieppe "against Morbecque (*Reserve Regts. Nos. 19 and 23*) [on exactly the front

Fleming's Force, covering Robecq, had relieved the right wing of the 184th Bde as far as Carvin, leaving the brigade about a twelve hundred yards' front.

Beyond this sector the front line to within a short distance of Wytschaete now ran on the lower slopes of the spurs which descend from the line of Flanders hills towards the Hazebrouck—Armentières railway, and mark the northern limit of the low and watery Lys flats as far east as Bailleul. The spurs terminate to the south in various knolls on which are situated Strazeele, Meteren, Bailleul, Ravelsberg, Crucifix Corner and Neuve Eglise, the last three separated from the main hills by the upper valley of the Douve.

The sector directly covering Hazebrouck between the Bourre and Merris (south-east of Strazeele), was held by the left wing of the 95th Brigade (5th Division); 4th Guards Bde (31st Divn); survivors of the 86th and 87th Bdes (29th Divn), holding less than a thousand yards; and the 92nd Bde (with details of the 92nd and 93rd Bdes attached as composite battalions) of the 31st Divn.¹ Here an attack in the morning fog at 6.30 A.M. was made by more than four German divisions (part of the *8th*, the *35th*, *12th Reserve*, *42nd*, and part of the *81st Reserve*). The movement started at a distance of about a quarter of a mile and gave every sign of a stubborn resolve to break through; yet it made little progress until nearly noon.²

"of the 18th and 95th Brigades]. . . The attack was from the beginning "under no lucky star. Of a powerful artillery preparation, which was "necessary, nothing was to be seen. Originally the advance of the *8th Bavarian Reserve Division* was only to begin after the *8th Division*, on "the right, had taken a certain farm. This was later altered, and the "advance was to be simultaneous."

The advance was made at 10.45 A.M. No progress was made, and "in "the afternoon orders were given to stop and dig in. The *8th Division* "on the right and *Res. Regt. No. 19* on the left, had not got any further. "The prospects of further progress of the attack became smaller and "smaller. . . . Moreover, the enemy artillery fired very briskly with "heavy and super-heavy guns. As a result of the pressure forward, the "infantry and artillery were closed up in mass at the head of the narrow "battle sector of the division. Every enclosure, every hedge, every house "was thickly garrisoned with men, horses and guns, and the effect of the "enemy artillery fire and air bombs was therefore very serious, and had a "grave effect on the hitherto splendid spirit of attack."

The failure of the *16th Division* is also admitted. See page 285, fn. 2.

¹ The remnants of the 93rd Bde were in reserve at Meteren.

² Of the German divisions engaged, the *35th* and *42nd* had taken part in the original assault against the Portuguese; the *8th* and *81st Reserve* had come into the battle on 11th April; and the *12th Reserve* was fresh

On the extreme right, the two strong battalions (1/Devonshire and 1/Cornwall L.I.) of the 95th Brigade repulsed all attacks, and when a gap was forced on their left, the 1/Cornwall L.I. counter-attacked with its support company and re-established touch with the 4th Guards Bde. Much weakened by previous fighting, the latter held a 4,500-yard front, a line of scattered farm buildings and scraps of trenches ; it was covered only by the 152nd Brigade R.F.A. (of the 34th Dn artillery, which having moved south on the 12th was now attached to the 5th Division) on the right, with occasional help from the 119th Army Brigade R.F.A. (with the 31st Divn) on the extreme left.¹ Here the 3/Coldstream, 4/Grenadiers and 12/K.O.Y.L.I. (pioneers under the orders of the brigade) with the 2/Irish Guards and 210th Field Company R.E. in support were attacked in the mist by four German regiments.² They maintained a long and stubborn fight. An armoured car appeared on a road opposite the right, only to be quickly driven off ;³ and, although a break-through was made at one place in the centre, the enemy was stopped by the Irish Guards and the support company of the 3/Coldstream, only thirty strong. Thus the only result of the German approach was that the front was driven in a little.

On the left flank, the right wing of the 12/K.O.Y.L.I. in and around Vieux Berquin with a gap between it and the Grenadiers, was blown out of its shelters in the cottages and gardens by the newly arrived artillery of the *12th Reserve Division* ; then, attacked by the right regiment of the *35th Division* and the left regiment of the *12th Reserve*, the battalion fell back five hundred yards. But its left wing continued to inflict heavy losses by enfilade fire on the Germans attempting to advance north of Vieux Berquin.

from the Lens sector. The last-named was interpolated in the line during the night of the 12th/13th, and the boundaries re-allotted : *8th Division* from the Hazebrouck—Merville railway to L'Epinette (near the right of the 4th Guards Bde front) ; *35th* thence to the southern end of Vieux Berquin ; *12th Reserve* thence on to Merris station. The boundary between the *35th* and *12th Reserve* does not appear to have been clearly fixed, and the regiments on the inner flanks became mixed up in the south part of Vieux Berquin.

¹ The 50th Dn artillery, which might have been used, was out of the line, and was sent next day to the 4th Divn.

² The right regiment of the *8th*, one of the *12th Reserve* and two of the *35th Division*.

³ "Regt. No. 72", p. 342, states that it was a captured Italian armoured car.

Wherever a gap arose in the Guards' front small enemy parties tried to penetrate and work round in rear of the defenders; yet the companies clung to their ground, and even reduced the Germans to the feeble ruse of shouting that they were the King's Company of the Grenadier Guards. The number of the defenders grew fewer and fewer, and the headquarters of the Coldstream and Grenadier Guards became part of the front line; but though broken into small parties, the three battalions clung tenaciously to the ground which they had been ordered to hold. The heaviest toll was taken of the enemy; nevertheless by 6 P.M. the left of the brigade front had been forced back on the Australian outpost line, established about a mile in rear. On the right a party of the Coldstream—two of whose companies had to all intents been wiped out—remained fighting until late in the evening, and few succeeded in escaping. On the left, Captain T. T. Pryce's company of the Grenadier Guards was cut off, and a company of the Irish Guards, sent by Lieut.-Colonel Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander to help him, was caught and annihilated in the attempt. Captain Pryce held out until evening when, ammunition being exhausted, he led the survivors in two bayonet charges, from which only one man of them escaped.¹ Finally the remnants of the 4/Grenadier Guards, 3/Coldstream Guards and 2/Irish Guards held the right of the line in front of that of the 1st Australian Division which elsewhere became the front.

The 12/K.O.Y.L.I. on the left, still involved in desperate fighting at Vieux Berquin against portions of the 176th, 61st and 38th Regiments, was gradually pushed back, for a time exposing still more the flank of the Grenadiers; but, about 2.30 P.M., after the village had been shelled by batteries of the 31st Divn the battalion drove the enemy back to the church.² Later a retirement was made to the line held by the Australians behind it, and on the other flank of the 4th Guards Bde the 1/Cornwall L.I. swung back to keep touch, the left company losing 50 per cent of its strength in the movement.

A weak and tired Guards brigade, with a weak pioneer battalion attached, had made a glorious defence against four German regiments, each equivalent in infantry to a British brigade and, with the remainder of the 31st and 29th

¹ For his great gallantry and determination on 12th and 13th April, Captain T. T. Pryce, M.C., was awarded a posthumous V.C.

² "Regt. No. 61", pp. 309-10.

Divns, had covered the detrainment of the 1st Australian Division, and saved Hazebrouck. To quote the words of Sir Douglas Haig's despatch: "The performance of all troops engaged in this most gallant stand, and especially that of the 4th Guards Brigade, on whose front of some 4,000 yards the heaviest attacks fell, is worthy of the highest praise. No more brilliant exploit has taken place since the opening of the enemy's offensive, though gallant actions have been without number." An even more practical tribute was that of the Assistant Provost Marshal, who reported that there had not been a single straggler on the roads behind the brigade on the 12th and 13th.

The stand had been made at very heavy cost: only 250 men remained to represent the 4th Guards Bde.¹

The early morning had found only four Australian battalions spread out as supports on a long front of about twelve thousand yards, lying behind hedges, in copses, gardens or orchards, or shallow trenches since deeper could not be dug in the waterlogged area near Nieppe Forest. During the day the rest of the 1st and 2nd Australian Brigades arrived and began to construct a second line of posts. The 3rd Brigade followed, having in its turn also been delayed by the shelling and bombing of Amiens railway centre.

Although the 29th and 31st Divns were calling for help it was considered best by Lieut.-General de Lisle to adhere to the original decision of the 12th April that the 1st Australian Division should form a new dam to check the enemy's advance rather than patch the old line. At 6 P.M. the XV. Corps ordered Major-General Walker (1st Australian Division) to take charge of the front at 9 A.M. next morning: he was informed that he could relieve what troops he liked, but there was to be no withdrawal from his present position. He then asked that the small scattered parties of the 4th Guards Be, and of the 86th, 87th and 92nd Bes on the left, should be withdrawn, as they might be a cause of confusion. He maintained only the men of the Guards, still on the extreme right, in an organized outpost line from Caudescure to Beaulieu Farm; also, in front of the extreme left, west

¹ The 4/Grenadier Guards had lost 17 out of 20 officers and 449 other ranks, 90 per cent; the 3/Coldstream, 12 officers out of 16 and 449 other ranks, and had 40 men left; the casualties of the 2/Irish Guards were 10 officers out of 19 and 250 other ranks. The 12/K.O.Y.L.I. lost 11 officers out of 19 and 262 other ranks.

of Meteren, he kept the 5/Scottish Rifles in a position which the battalion commander considered too good to be relinquished. The reliefs of the rest of the 29th and 31st Divns were completed before daybreak.

There was no reason to relieve the 86th, 87th and 92nd Bes, north of Vieux Berquin, except on account of their very heavy losses, since they had maintained their main line all day, as will be related, against the attack of two fresh regiments of the *12th Reserve Division*. To this end they were most effectively assisted by four field artillery brigades under the C.R.A. of the 57th Division, (Br.-General J. C. Wray) whose batteries contributed some valuable enfilade fire from the north.¹ Both sides had opened with gun-fire between 5 and 6 A.M., and the light from the blaze of Bleu Farm disclosed large numbers of the enemy, who were dealt with by gun, machine-gun and rifle fire. A dawn attack was thereby prevented. At 8 A.M., covered by trench-mortar fire, the enemy made a fresh attempt, which was repulsed. His infantry was again seen deploying at 9.25 A.M., but not until 10.30 was it attacking all along the outpost line, which in front of Merris gradually withdrew to the main line. Towards evening, however, many casualties were inflicted by the Germans, who fired from the houses in Vieux Berquin when they got into the village. It was evident that the men of the 29th Divn were exhausted, there being a constant drift back towards the Australian line. At 5.25 P.M., Br.-General O. de L. Williams (92nd Be) received information that the 4th Guards Be was nearly surrounded and trying to fall back through the 1st Australian Division; he therefore drew back his right flank; but, hearing from the 86th Be that the situation in Vieux Berquin was in hand, he recalled the troops to their original position, and it was not until orders came during the night, in consequence of Major-General Walker's wish to reorganize the front, that the remnants of the 86th and 87th Bes were withdrawn through the line of the 1st Australian Division. The I., XI. and XV. Corps of the First Army, in spite of losses, could feel that they had had a successful day: only in the left centre had a strip of ground, a mile deep and five miles long, been given up, and behind this now stood the 1st Australian Division. The enemy

¹ The 57th Division artillery had remained, when the 40th Divn relieved the 57th in the Fleurbaix sector on the 2nd April, the latter division taking over the artillery of the 38th Divn.

advance had certainly been slowed down, and, it was hoped, stopped.

Map 19.
Sketch
21.

The front of the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Gordon), now twelve and a half miles long and facing south-south-east instead of east, had in its centre, between Bailleul and Neuve Eglise, a large curved salient. This was held for the most part by five tired brigades (147th, 101st, 74th, 88th and 102nd), under Major-General Nicholson (34th Dn), with the 103rd Be in reserve. Only the left sector around Neuve Eglise, held by the 75th Be and 100th Brigade, with the 7th Be and 148th Bde in support, was under the 25th Dn (Major-General Sir G. Bainbridge). It was this salient which was abandoned during the day owing to the penetration of the enemy into the Neuve Eglise sector, where the line was much broken.

On the right of the salient in the IX. Corps area the 19th Brigade (Br.-General C. R. G. Mayne) of the 33rd Division, with a machine-gun company, reinforced by the XXII. Corps Reinforcement Battalion and 2/New Zealand Entrenching Battalion, held nearly a three-mile front. As early as 5.30 A.M. it was attacked in the mist by the greater part of the *81st Reserve Division*, special efforts being made against the centre troops (1/Queen's and part of the 5/Scottish Rifles) covering Meteren. The enemy's attacks were repeated at 8.45 A.M., 1 P.M. and 4.30 P.M., and small advantages were gained, with the general result that by evening, in spite of counter-attacks and hand-to-hand fighting, and the support of the 25th Dn artillery (Br.-General K. J. Kincaid-Smith) which had arrived,¹ the brigade had fallen back to a new line, about half a mile in rear, on the slopes to the south of Meteren. In view of the danger which this threatened, Major-General Pinney (33rd Division) had, at 8 A.M., ordered forward the two remaining battalions of the 98th Brigade,² which were at Keerseboom (2 miles E.N.E. of Bailleul) sending the 2/Argyll, to Meulehouck, north of Bailleul, and at 5.40 P.M., the 4/King's to Meteren, where, by 7.30 P.M., it was digging in on the northern outskirts.

Major-General Nicholson's six brigades had a more successful day than could possibly have been foreseen, for

¹ Its brigades (X. and 112th) were attached to the 33rd Division and sent to the southern slopes of Mont des Cats, to cover Meteren and the line south of the village.

² The 1/Middlesex was with the 34th Dn.

they had as opponents no less than six divisions of the *II. Bavarian Corps*, the *11th Reserve, Alpine*,¹ *10th Ersatz* and *117th* in front line, with the *38th* and *32nd* in support; and of these the *Alpine* and *38th* were fresh. The British front had the advantage of being on the slopes of the low hills that lie between Bailleul and Neuve Eglise, so that observed artillery support was possible over the plain to the south. Partial attacks took place in the mist towards 6 A.M.; in the centre one battalion was forced back, but in half an hour, with the help of an artillery barrage, the line had been re-established. On the left the *102nd Be*, was soon heavily attacked by the *117th Division*, and found itself in difficulties owing to the retirement of the adjoining *75th Be (25th Dn)*, by which its left flank was exposed. The attack, however, broke down, possibly because the *117th Division* was shelled by the artillery of the neighbouring *214th Division*.²

From 9 A.M. onwards the *34th Dn* was shelled by field artillery without serious effect, as ditches provided cover and counter-battery work smothered many of the enemy's guns.³ Finally at 3.30 P.M. a general attack was launched against it. Heavy toll was taken of the attackers by machine guns and rifles as they crossed the fields between the hedgerows; but the two brigades on the right were forced back from two to five hundred yards, while the left retired over a thousand yards. The reinforcements for the *2/Worcestershire*, under two hundred men in all, who formed the local reserves on this latter wing, fell almost to a man: the support battalion, the *Royal Newfoundland Regiment*, managed at last by very heavy fire to bring the enemy to a standstill, but not, however, until he was within twenty-five yards of its trenches.

Major-General Nicholson's anxiety throughout the day was for his left flank, on account of the fighting round Neuve Eglise; as a precaution he sent his engineers to prepare a reserve position of machine-gun and rifle posts, loopholed farm buildings and walls behind the line already dug on the Ravelsberg—Crucifix Corner ridge. During the morning he heard that the Germans after penetrating into Neuve Eglise had been driven out; also that a large gap existed

¹ The so-called *Alpine Corps* had the organization of a division. The *Alpine Corps* and *117th Division* were to capture Bailleul by "pinching" it out from either flank. "*Fourth Army Diary*", p. 100.

² See Note II. at end of Chapter.

³ In addition to the *38th Divn* artillery the *34th Dn* was supported by three 6-inch howitzer batteries of the corps heavy artillery.

eastward of De Broecken, on his left rear. He therefore made provisional arrangements for the withdrawal of his command to two successive lines, covered by the 103rd Be and the 1/Middlesex (33rd Division), put at his disposal that morning. Communication with his brigades was difficult, as the buried cable system did not extend back beyond Neuve Eglise. The IX. Corps then informed him that reinforcements were on the way, and that the 25th Dn would block the gap on his left. He decided, therefore, to hold his ground.

During the afternoon, however, whilst he was being attacked in front, the enemy worked farther and farther round his left flank, so that part of the 102nd, in the endeavour to maintain the flank, was actually facing to the rear (northwards). Rumours that the line of the 88th Be (29th Divn, but attached to the 34th) had been broken about 7.30 P.M. proved untrue; it was in every way holding its own, Br.-General Freyberg having anxiety only for what might happen on his left. At 9.20 P.M., however, orders were sent by Major-General Nicholson to continue resistance. These orders did not coincide with the views of the brigadiers on the spot, who, in the course of the afternoon, had managed either to meet or to communicate and to make all the preliminary arrangements for retirement during the night, as the pressure of at least four enemy divisions on five weak brigades was proving too heavy and the resulting casualties too severe to justify a further stand. As a collapse on the left would endanger the long front facing south on either side of Bailleul, the 34th Dn, with Lieut.-General Gordon's approval, sanctioned the withdrawal, and telephoned an urgent order to brigades for immediate retirement, beginning on the east, to the first line selected: southern suburbs of Bailleul—Mont de Lille—Ravelsberg—Crucifix Corner.

In spite of the enemy being almost round and close up to the 88th and 102nd Bes, he had been so severely dealt with that the withdrawal was carried out without interference; and by daylight the troops under the 34th Dn were reported on their new positions. Unluckily the cellar which sheltered the headquarters of Br.-General R. C. Gore, who, as senior brigadier had done so much to second Major-General Nicholson's efforts, was struck by a shell and he was killed together with his signal officer, whilst his brigade-major was wounded. The G.O.C. and staff of the 74th Be, in the same cellar, escaped serious hurt, though

buried to the waist in bricks; so Br.-General Craigie Halkett temporarily took over the command of the 101st Be in addition to that of his own.¹ The 102nd Be was found to be so reduced in numbers that it was taken out of the line.

It will be recalled, that the fighting on the 12th near the danger point on the Neuve Eglise front in the 25th Dn area, had left the line there in a salient (part of the original Green Line) held by the 100th Brigade and a machine-gun company, with the 75th Be and 148th Bde on either flank and the 7th Be in reserve. The 1,200-yard long gap on the left of the 148th Bde, between it and the 19th Dn, had been filled at 5 A.M. by the arrival of the 94th Field Company R.E. and a company of the 10/Worcestershire (57th Be, 19th Dn) sent there by Major-General Jeffreys. Later the 2/5th Sherwood Foresters from the 178th Bde (59th Divn), in reserve at Dranoutre, was ordered up in support; but it was not until 11 A.M. that the battalion was in position with two companies in front line and two companies in reserve.

At 5 A.M. the Germans, favoured by four good approach roads, massed in the fog close in front of the 75th Be, and, without any preliminary bombardment, drove it northwards. Part of the brigade was able to rally on the 105th Field Company R.E. (reduced to a dozen men) and two companies of the 9/Highland L.I. (Glasgow), the reserve of the 100th Brigade, south of Neuve Eglise, while the remainder went right back to the 7th Be, the divisional reserve, in the line selected as the second position, a mile and a half away, near Crucifix Corner. The torrent of the *214th Division* which poured through the breach turned partly to the left against the flank of Major-General Nicholson's force; partly continued straight on against Neuve Eglise; and partly wheeled to the right against the 100th Brigade, south-east of Neuve Eglise. It was eventually to be held up by a ring of fire.

The 9/Highland L.I. (less one company with the 88th Be) maintained its position until 6.30 P.M., and even when forced back by weight of numbers managed to form a thin line across the Bailleul—Neuve Eglise road, until it was ordered at 5 A.M. next morning to withdraw via Crucifix Corner. The Germans who turned against the right and

¹ Lieut.-Colonel A. Stephenson was subsequently ordered to take command of the 101st Be.

rear of the 100th Brigade, overran the headquarters of the 16/K.R.R.C., on the right, and dislocated the defence, so that further resistance was reduced to the action of isolated parties, who, however, fought stubbornly, the survivors not coming in until the 15th April.

In the meantime, other portions of the *214th Division* had pressed on until they were behind the 2/Worcestershire, on the eastern face of the salient, and into Neuve Eglise, whilst the *31st Division* was attacking this battalion in front and also the 148th Bde, next on the north. These portions reached the centre of the village, but were immediately counter-attacked by the 458th Field Company R.E. (49th Divn) and the reserve company of the 2/Worcestershire, and retreated eastwards towards the rear of the 1/4th York & Lancaster, the left of the 148th Bde. Seeing the enemy in the village threatening their rear, the support companies of the York & Lancaster had hastily reversed their parapet and sent a party under two officers towards the village. Caught between two fires, the Germans were killed or captured, the Hallamshire men bringing back fifty prisoners, including a battalion commander. At 10 A.M., when information reached the 178th Bde that the Germans had captured Neuve Eglise, Br.-General T. W. Stansfeld ordered his two remaining battalions to move towards the village for the purpose of counter-attack; but by 1.30 P.M. officers' patrols had discovered that it was clear of the enemy and no further action was taken.

Like the 102nd Be to the south of the gap, the forward companies of the 2/Worcestershire, in spite of the Germans having arrived in their rear, maintained their position until 6 P.M.¹ At that hour the left company, due east of Neuve Eglise, reported that the pressure was becoming very heavy; and, to prevent the line from being broken, a retirement was ordered. It was carried out under difficulties, as the enemy followed close. Battalion headquarters, with half a company, made their way to the Mairie, in the centre of the village, which was put in a state of defence. The Germans soon swarmed round it and cut off the defenders; but the rest of the battalion reached the southern outskirts of the village and there joined what remained of the 16/K.R.R.C. On the left of the Worcestershire, the

¹ See the German account of the fighting in Note II. at end of Chapter, which indicates that the attackers of the 100th Brigade and the 148th Bde on its left, suffered very heavily.

148th Bde had clung to its trenches until well on into the afternoon, when, in spite of counter-attacks, the right was gradually driven back about a quarter of a mile, but maintained its position in the line. At 8 P.M., therefore, the left was still in touch with the 19th Dn and the right alongside the 2/Worcestershire.

Fighting continued throughout the night, and when dawn came it was seen that the enemy had occupied Neuve Eglise in strength, though the headquarters of the 2/Worcestershire were still holding out. From the south-eastern outskirts of the village eastwards, the line was continuous, but westwards there was a gap of two thousand yards, where the 75th Be should have been, between Neuve Eglise and the left of the 34th Dn. Behind this gap there was, however, a formed line, hinged on the left of the 34th Dn at Crucifix Corner, and thence running north-eastwards along a low ridge, parallel to the Neuve Eglise knoll to a point two thousand yards north of Neuve Eglise. On this was disposed the 71st Bde (less a battalion) of the 6th Divn, under Br.-General P. W. Brown. During the day this brigade had come by bus from the Ypres area to Dranoutre, where it arrived at 5 P.M., having been allotted by the IX. Corps to the 25th Dn to restore the situation south-west of Neuve Eglise. It was at first ordered to the reserve line along the road Bailleul—Dranoutre—Kemmel, but was directed by Major-General Bainbridge at 11.10 P.M. to fill the gap in the front line between the 34th Dn and the 100th Brigade. This order was cancelled verbally, just as the battalions were moving off, in consequence of the uncertainty of the situation at Neuve Eglise, and at 3 A.M. on the 14th they were sent to the line above described, on which they were formed up before dawn. Behind them in the reserve line near Dranoutre were Wyatt's Force and the XXII. (New Zealand) Cyclist Battalion.¹

Eastward of the 25th Dn, in the 19th Dn sector, such attacks as were delivered by the enemy (*36th Reserve, 49th Reserve and 17th Reserve Divisions*) were easily repelled.

¹ During the day Br.-Generals G. A. Armytage and L. J. Wyatt of the 39th Divn and several staff officers arrived, and were sent to the 33rd Division, where they were given command of composite forces collected from schools and from instruction and reinforcement camps, which were put at the disposal of the 25th Dn.

Wyatt's Force consisted of about a thousand rifles and 12 machine guns, with 180 men of the 25th Dn R.E. (all that remained of the three field companies) and 190 Men of the 9/L. North Lancashire (74th Be, 25th Dn).

Arrangements, therefore, were made for the 58th Be, which had been returned to the 19th Dn from the 9th Divn at 11 A.M., to relieve the S. African Be and the remnants of the 10/R. Warwickshire and pioneer company (5/South Wales Borderers) on its right; whilst the 2/7th Sherwood Foresters, with the 2/6th in support (both of the 178th Bde) relieved the 1st and 9/R. Irish Fusiliers of the 108th Be, further to the right; the latter troops were sent to Mount Kemmel and reorganized as a two-company battalion. The reserves, now consisting of two battalions of the 57th Be and portions of the 58th and 178th, were established in the Crucifix Corner—Kemmel line, where they found the 81st Field Company R.E. The remaining two brigades, the 176th and 177th, of the 59th Divn were also brought from the Ypres area, and by the early morning of the 14th were concentrated at Locre (3 miles north-west of Neuve Eglise, and about the same distance north-east of Bailleul). The leading regiment of the French 133rd Divn was reported at 7.45 P.M. to have reached Flêtre (2 miles west of Meteren), and at 11.55 P.M. the IX. Corps asked that it might be moved to a position from which it could act offensively against the flank of an enemy attacking Meteren. It was subsequently placed south of Flêtre, behind the junction of the XV. and IX. Corps.

From statements made by prisoners, it had become evident that the enemy intended to continue his attack on the morning of the 14th against Meteren, Bailleul and Neuve Eglise. At 10.50 P.M., in order to regularize matters, as Lieut.-General Gordon had shortly before sanctioned the withdrawal of the 34th Dn, the IX. Corps issued a formal order for the 34th and 25th Dns to withdraw to the line Bailleul station—Crucifix Corner—Neuve Eglise, posts being left out to delay the enemy's advance as long as possible. By this time the 34th Dn was on this line and the 25th Dn behind it.

Conflicting reports had reached, and continued to reach, Lieut.-General Gordon as regards the situation at Neuve Eglise; by 11.30 P.M., however, it seemed certain that the Germans had forced an entry into the village. Lieut.-General Gordon had sent his chief General Staff officer, Br.-General W. J. Maxwell-Scott, to discuss the situation with the commanders of the 19th and 25th Dns, and about midnight he had a conference with them. Major-General Jeffreys, whose division, though threatened, had hardly been attacked during the day, and who knew what a good

fight the troops under the 25th Dn had been making, urged very strongly the importance of retaining, or regaining possession of the village, and offered a battalion of the 178th Bde to help the 71st Bde in a counter attack, but his views were not accepted. Lieut.-General Gordon had to make a decision whether he would abandon the place or not. To evacuate Neuve Eglise would enable the enemy to establish himself on high ground which it was of great importance to retain; on the other hand, the continuance of the battle for its possession must result in further heavy casualties. Considering that the cost would not be justified by the advantage gained, at 2.40 A.M. on the 14th Lieut.-General Gordon issued the conditional order that "if a heavy enemy attack resulted in the defending troops being unable to hold Neuve Eglise, divisions will fall back fighting to the general line Ravelsberg—Crucifix Corner, and thence north-eastwards to Spanbroekmolen". Part of this order had already been carried out.

Thus the general result of the day had been that on the right and in the centre of the great pocket, twelve miles wide and six miles deep, in the Allied line there had been no change except that the 4th Guards Bde had fallen back about a mile on to the outpost line of the 1st Australian Division. As the rest of this division was then in course of arrival, and all the sting had been taken out of the German offensive, the situation seemed secure and Hazebrouck saved. On the left wing a considerable sector of ground, $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in depth, had been lost between Bailleul and Neuve Eglise, and the enemy was evidently aiming at the line of hills Mont des Cats—Mount Kemmel. Here the reinforcements available were the French 133rd Divn and the 71st Bde, and the 176th and 177th Bdes, all of which had fought in the March battle.¹

In the evening the Commander-in-Chief instructed Lieut.-General Sir N. Birch, his Artillery Adviser, to see that the Second Army was taking steps to hold the line of hills, Mont des Cats—Mount Kemmel as flank position to the troops in the Ypres Salient. At the same time he directed Lieut.-General Sir H. Lawrence, the Chief of the General Staff, to speak to General Plumer on the telephone as regards the withdrawal from the Salient, pointing out that the British front had increased in length owing to the

¹ Instructions were received from General Foch to "ménager la 133^e division française afin de lui donner le temps de se réorganiser".

retirements further south, that the troops were tired and their effective strength falling; lastly that there was no probability of getting any more British divisions as reinforcements, although some French divisions, in addition to the 133rd, might arrive. General Plumer with great reluctance agreed that he should retire to the Kemmel—Pilkem line, but as he and the commanders of the II. and XXII. Corps felt sure that they could maintain their position, he gave no orders on the subject. In view of a further withdrawal, however, the artillerymen were hard at work removing the forward dumps of ammunition, a colossal work against time.

At 1.30 P.M. General Plumer had issued an order informing his troops of a general improvement in the situation; of the movement of the reserves; of the arrival of the various reinforcements, French 133rd Divn, 1st Australian Division and British and French cavalry; and he also fixed corps headquarters. Under pressure of his Staff, he consented to sleep at Blendecques (3 miles south of St. Omer), as Cassel was an easy target for aeroplanes, and his administrative staff was also moved there. General Horne issued an Order of the Day to the First Army, affirming his complete confidence that "at this critical moment, when the existence of the Empire is at stake, all ranks will do their very best".

The night passed quietly, except for patrol encounters; it was too misty and dark for bombing, and many men had their first sleep for five nights. The troops had been fighting splendidly, and felt that with reinforcements the enemy could be stopped. Ammunition supply was running well; very few dumps had been blown up, and most of the forward ones were cleared; but the mechanical transport never failed to replenish stores, a constant stream of vehicles travelling in both directions all night, unhindered by enemy action. Among the tasks which had to be undertaken was the evacuation of 800 lunatics from the St. Venant asylum; this was carried out during the night of the 13th/14th by means of lorries, which had to be diverted from their normal duties for the purpose.

No help or advice came to G.H.Q. from London, except a suggestion from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that General Robertson might be found useful in France: it was not said in what capacity.

The state of infantry reinforcement was by no means satisfactory. Calculations showed that 26,000 infantry

casualties had been suffered in the first three days of battle, 9th-11th April. There were in hand, 11,000 men; drafts expected during April numbered 25,000; recovered wounded to the end of April meant, perhaps, 30,000; that is, there was a total of 66,000, barely more than enough to replace a week's casualties. In addition, the 52nd Division had arrived from Palestine; the 74th Division was being despatched from Egypt; and some 8,000 or 9,000 B.I. men in England were being formed into Garrison battalions, and would be ready for despatch at the end of the month. The forecast of drafts from England was, for May, 20,000; for June, 23,000; for July, 22,000, with, perhaps, 17,000 more from Egypt.

On the 13th April, General Foch issued one Directive and one Instruction; the first, at 8.30 A.M., addressed to the British Third Army and French Tenth Army; the second, also at 8.30 A.M., to the French Tenth Army only. The Directive was as follows:

"In the case of a powerful attack forcing back the Allied line between Albert and Arras, it is of the highest importance that the enemy should be definitely stopped on the line Colincamps—Fonquevillers—Monchy au Bois—Arras, and, in particular, that we, at all costs, remain in possession of the high ground in the area Pommier—Monchy au Bois—Fonquevillers—Souastre.

"To meet this eventuality and assist the British Third Army, the attached Instruction has been sent to the French Tenth Army.

"The commanders of the British Third Army and the French Tenth Army will therefore arrange to settle between themselves where the French Tenth Army should be placed in readiness and prepare plans for their eventual co-operative action."

In the Instruction, the French Tenth Army was warned that, on completion of its march on the 13th April, it was to consider itself in a state of readiness to intervene in the battle in one of three ways: "(1) it might counter-attack the enemy if he had forced the British line south of Arras; (2) it might meet the enemy frontally and bring him to a standstill if the British had been compelled to fall back between Albert and Ayette; (3) it might intervene to help the British line south of Albert".

In order to fulfil, in case of need, any one of these tasks General Foch considered that the correct position for the

Tenth Army was astride the river Authie, on the high ground about Bertrancourt, six miles east of Doullens and south of the river, and about Souastre, north of it.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH ON THE 13TH APRIL ¹

At 5 A.M. on the 13th April, the three divisions of the French II. Cavalry Corps (General Robillot), resumed their march to St. Omer; they halted for the night at 1 P.M. in an area 17 miles S.S.W. of that town. They had covered 66 to 72 miles in 24 hours.

In the course of the day, General Robillot received a Directive which General Foch had issued on the 12th April, based on the views he had expressed to Major-General Davidson during an interview at Sarcus in the evening of the 11th April.² This Directive explained the method by which the enemy's attack, if continued against Hazebrouck and possibly beyond it, might first be limited in scope and then brought to a standstill by the Allied forces: the first step would be the occupation, in stages as the attack progressed, of two lines, of which one, facing north-east, would run from Béthune to St. Omer; and the other, fronting south, from Cassel to Mount Kemmel: between these lines, which would be held at all costs, and which would be "dams" to confine the enemy torrent, others facing east, thus opposing the attack frontally, would be held in succession. These lines, which would serve to slow down the enemy advance and finally to bring it to a halt, would be (a) Bailleul—Nieppe Forest; (b) Berthen—Caestre—Hazebrouck—Aire; (c) Cassel—Ebbelinghem; (d) Cassel—Clairmarais Forest.

General Foch placed under General Plumer all the French forces in the British zone. They would be commanded by General Robillot, who, in addition to his II. Cavalry Corps, would therefore have the 133rd Divn, concentrating near Flêtre; the 28th Division (fresh), in process of moving to Bergues, where it would detrain and proceed south-east to the Watou area: and the 59th Regiment of Pack Artillery, which would arrive at St. Omer on the 14th April and be attached to the 28th Division.

The heads of the two leading divisions of the French Tenth Army reached a line 5 miles south of Doullens by the night of the 13th/14th April, with the other two strung out behind them.³ General Maistre, the Army commander, gave orders that by the 15th the Army was to be astride the river Authie in the area indicated by General Foch, ready to move north-east, east or south-east.

The movement of the French Fifth Army was begun: two divisions of the XVI. Corps (31st and 32nd) were sent by lorry from the region of Beauvais and reached the Somme on the 14th.

¹ The account of this day in F.O.A. is scanty, as only movements of troops were in progress.

² See page 247.

³ The 34th around Candas, the 154th around Beauval, with the 129th around Talmas, and the 14th around Rainneville.

During the day the Germans tentatively attacked the French lines near Hangard and near Laon, but were repulsed. No orders were issued by either General Foch or General Pétain for counter-offensives to relieve the pressure on the British, though the long weak flank of Hutier's Army offered a fine opportunity.

NOTE II

THE GERMANS ON THE 13TH APRIL

The *Sixth Army* once more gave as objectives : Bailleul, Meteren, Map 19. Strazeele and Nieppe Forest, and again directed the *LV. Corps* to capture the crossings over the La Bassée canal between Guarbecque and Mont Bernenchon.

The *Fourth Army* proposed only to launch an attack with the *X. Reserve Corps* against the high ground between Neuve Eglise and Bailleul, whilst the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* made preparations for an enveloping attack on Wyttschaete which was to take place on the 16th.

These orders were approved by Crown Prince Rupprecht, with the addition of instructions to ensure co-operation between the inner flanks of the two Armies, and thus facilitate the advance of the *Sixth Army*.

The accounts of the day are not very full :

Sixth Army : The *II. Bavarian Corps* [opposite the 34th Dn] of four divisions, plus two in support, had very heavy fighting near Bailleul, failing to capture the town ; but it advanced towards the Bailleul—Meteren road. Further to the south, Merris was captured and a certain amount of progress made near Vieux Berquin [this might refer to the fighting with the 4th Guards Bde] and towards the Aire and La Bassée canal in the direction of Mont Bernenchon.

Fourth Army : " Owing to bad staff work between the corps on the " inner flanks of the two Armies, the *II. Bavarian Corps* advanced " at 6.30 A.M., half an hour before the time fixed for the start of " the *X. Reserve Corps* [left of *Fourth Army*, five divisions, opposite " the 25th Dn] ; its right division (*117th*) took a direction of attack " almost perpendicular to that of its neighbour (*214th*) of the " *Fourth Army*, and was caught by the fire of the artillery of the " *214th*, the effect of which was combined with that of the British " machine guns ; the division stopped, very shaken, and the Bavarian " corps postponed its operations [until 2.30 P.M.].

" At 7 A.M. the *X. Reserve Corps*, which had not noticed what " had happened to its neighbour, began its attack ; its left division " (*214th*) reached the high ground west of Neuve Eglise ; but, coming " under violent fire, exposed on the left because the *II. Bavarian " Corps* had not advanced, and vigorously counter-attacked, it " was driven back in a very bad state, almost to its starting line. As " a result of this incident, the rest of the day was passed in an acrimonious discussion between the headquarters of the two Armies." ¹ In the evening, however, the *X. Reserve Corps* (*36th Reserve Division* and *214th Division*, the latter supported by the *11th Bavarian*

¹ Also, as the messages in "*Fourth Army Diary*", pp. 102-8, show, it called forth some caustic remarks from General Ludendorff.

Division) "entered Neuve Eglise, and occupied the ridge west of "the village [in the gap]; it established touch towards De Broecken "with the *II. Bavarian Corps*, whose right division had captured "Deseule [held by the 102nd Be].¹

"The *Guard Corps* continued to prepare for its attack on Bix- "schoote." The *XVIII. Reserve Corps* [opposite the 19th Dn] did nothing.

The following account, taken from the history of the *12th Reserve Field Artillery Regiment (12th Reserve Division)* gives some idea of the German difficulties. The division, after three days' rest and a short march on the 10th April, started on the 11th at 2.45 P.M. after waiting on parade from 9 A.M. and reached Haut Pommereau (near Neuve Chapelle, 5 miles S.S.E. of Estaires) at 1.20 A.M. on the 12th. "The march was carried out under extreme difficulties", owing to "entire lack of road control" and "hour-long" blocks on the road. At 5 A.M., the march was resumed over the shell-cratered area. "The engineers of the troops ahead had certainly made some "sort of bridges over the trenches, and tried to repair the foundered "roads, but, all the same, it was most troublesome to get forward."² At 8 A.M. the division was ordered to press on, without stopping, to Vieux Berquin with all available forces. There were everywhere signs of fighting. "The flight of the Portuguese had evidently been "exceptionally rapid. In the peasants' cottages, which lay along- "side the road, foodstuff was still on the table, and in the fields "were scattered guns with the shells still in the bore. After a long "halt, the division at last, about midday, reached Estaires, which "was still burning." In and beyond the town the roads were blocked with troops, offering splendid targets to the enemy airmen. "The "infantry, as well as the artillery, suffered very heavy losses in the "afternoon and during the night. The *38th Reserve Infantry Regi- "ment* alone lost sixty men in marching through Estaires; equally "great were the casualties in officers, men and horses of the *7th "Battery*." The division bivouacked, but "the very welcome short "rest was broken by enemy airmen, who searched the ground and "threw bombs". On the 13th, an advance of the artillery "in "sight of the enemy, brought very heavy losses".

An officer of the *Alpine Corps*, after the War, wrote as follows to a British officer:

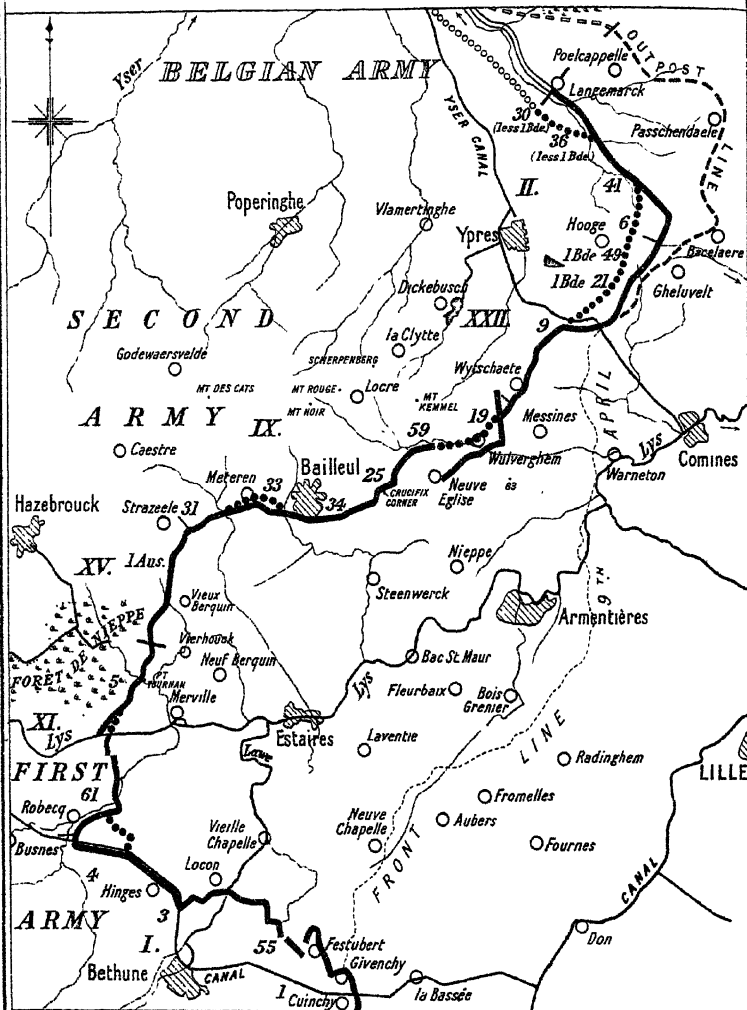
"To us, the 13th April 1918 was a disappointment. We were "accustomed to definite success in attaining our objective every- "where, in Serbia, in front of Verdun, in Rumania and Italy. For "the first time, on this 13th April, we succeeded in gaining only a "few hundred metres of ground. I think I may say that the de- "fenders on the British front in April 1918 were the best troops of "the many with whom we crossed swords in the course of the four "and a quarter years."

¹ A captured telegram shows that the *11th Bavarian Division* was put in because "the general situation imperatively demands that the heights "east of Bailleul [Ravelsberg—Crucifix Corner and Neuve Eglise] should "be rapidly seized".

² Another account mentions that the regiment was ordered to make a plank or slab road, but as there was no transport available, and there was a 3- to 4-mile carry, very little was done.

Sketch 22.

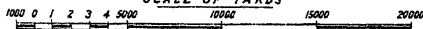
THE LYS, 14TH APRIL.



REFERENCE

Line 14th April 15th April a.m.
Army boundaries Corps boundaries

SCALE OF YARDS



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

CHAPTER XV

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

14TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLES OF HAZEBROUCK AND BAILLEUL (*continued*)

(Maps 20, 21 ; Sketch 22)

ON Sunday the 14th April, along the whole front the clouds were low, with a high north-east wind and occasional showers.¹ Very little flying was done, except by the I. Brigade R.A.F., which had machines out all day reconnoitring, bombing and machine-gunning the enemy troops on the First Army front. Four and a half tons of bombs were dropped, of which four were the contribution of the I. Brigade. Enemy aircraft activity was reported as "nil", and no air fighting took place.

Map 20.
Sketch 22.

There was little change in the general situation during the day: at a number of places the Germans attacked bravely, only to be shot down by hundreds, and by evening their leaders regarded the offensive as having come to a standstill, only to be got going again by a success on the northern flank near Houthulst Forest. It was considered quite impossible to shift the British on the southern flank, where they still held fast to the Givenchy position and the canal line.²

In the G.H.Q. Intelligence Summary for the day, it was estimated that, owing to the arrival of two more German divisions from Russia, the total on the Western Front had risen to 205: three fresh divisions (two from O.H.L. reserve) had taken part in the fighting against the British

¹ The R.A.F. communiqué speaks of mist prevailing, but neither British nor German reports mention this, although both mention high wind and low clouds.

² See Note II. at end of Chapter, which might be read at this point, as it gives a good clue to this day of successful defence.

on the 18th, making a total of 25, all fresh, employed since the beginning of the battle on the 9th April. Since the 21st March, 122 divisions had been engaged, leaving 83 to be accounted for; of these; 19 were of poor quality; 42 were fresh, but in the line; of the remaining 22 immediately available, 13 were probably opposite the British front. On the front taken over by the French Third and First Armies from the British Fourth (Fifth) Army, the opposing numbers were about equal, but the French divisions were fresher than those of Hutier's army.

In the sector of the I. Corps between Givenchy and Robecq, exclusive, along which the 55th, 3rd and 4th Divns were faced by five German divisions, there was little enemy activity, except gun-fire. Lieut.-General Holland took the opportunity to pinch out the acute re-entrant angle at the junction of the I. Corps with its neighbour, the XI. The operation was entrusted to the 11th Bde (Br.-General T. S. H. Wade) and was carried out by the 1/Somerset L.I. and 1/Hampshire. Late in the afternoon, men were dribbled across the half-dozen bridges over the canal in twos and threes, whilst for the last half hour before zero heavy artillery shelled the woods and small valleys where the enemy supports and reserves were sheltering. At 6.30 P.M., under an 18-pdr. barrage, the infantry advanced and secured the base of the re-entrant—a line through Riez du Vinage—capturing 135 prisoners and 20 machine guns, also recovering two of the batteries lost by the 51st Dn on the 12th April.

On the XI. Corps front from Robecq to L'Épinette, along which the 61st Divn and 5th Division, with the 51st and 50th Dns in reserve, were faced by five German divisions, there was strenuous fighting all day; but the line was held intact, although the enemy made determined efforts to capture Baquerolles Farm and houses nearby from the 184th Bde. His attempts to capture these buildings, which covered a passage of the Clarence, and to advance on both banks of the Lys remained fruitless and only resulted in offering splendid targets to the fire of the defence. On the southern bank of the Lys, four attacks were made against the 183rd Bde; the first three were completely repulsed, the fourth gained one post near the river, which was recovered during the night. On the northern bank of the river, three attempts were made against the 18th Brigade, but they were all frustrated by the fire of the divisional artillery alone. The 95th Brigade, next on the left, had

hard fighting from 11 A.M. onwards; the enemy put down heavy barrages of high explosive and gas behind the front line to prevent reinforcements being sent up, and at 1 P.M. brigade headquarters was struck by a direct hit, wounding Br.-General Lord Esme Gordon-Lennox, his brigade-major and eight other ranks. But the front was not penetrated anywhere, the attackers being met by such a blast of fire of all arms, that they soon wilted away. Two brigades of the 5th Division in open warfare had successfully stopped the *8th Bavarian Reserve*, the *8th* and half of the *48th Reserve Division*.

In the Second Army area at dawn on the 14th, except a small portion on the right where survivors of the 4th Guards Bn were still in position, the whole of the XV. Corps front was held by the 1st Australian Division.¹ The first contact with the enemy, that is part of the *48th Reserve*, the *35th*, the *12th Reserve* and part of the *42nd Division*, had taken place at midnight, when the *III. Battalion of the 141st Regiment (35th Division)*, moving up a lane without precautions, ran into a post of the 8th Australian Battalion. The latter, withholding its fire until the Germans were within twenty yards, shot down the leading company and scattered the rest. Warned by this misadventure, at 6.40 A.M. the enemy resorted to bombardment before coming on again, and gradually deployed for attack from his right. By about 8 A.M. the 3rd Australian Battalion could see "miles of Germans", with officers on horseback, coming forward in several lines, their objective, it is now known, being the Strazeele ridge. The field artillery took a heavy toll of them, and then the Lewis gunners had their turn; so that, although the Germans stoutly continued their attack for over two hours, at only a few places did they get within half a mile of the Australian line of posts. Then a small flank counter-attack of twenty men, led by an enterprising officer, sent them running back. By noon, the fighting in this quarter had ceased; but it was renewed at 2 P.M. and again at 7 P.M. without any result except more heavy German casualties. Against the two battalions in the 2nd Australian Brigade and the party representing the 4th Guards Bn,

Map 20
Sketch
22.

¹ The 7th and 8th Battalions (2nd Brigade) and the 3rd Australian Battalion (1st Brigade) in front line, which was held by a series of posts.

Its own artillery not having arrived, it was covered by that of the 24th, 34th and 57th Divns, divided into two groups under Br.-Generals E. C. W. D. Walthall and J. C. Wray.

the Germans equally failed to get near the line until about 2 P.M., when, having shelled the garrison out of two posts somewhat in advance of the general line, they took advantage of a factory building as a jumping-off place, and occupied them. A line was formed two hundred yards behind the lost posts and no other ground was surrendered. Next day the heavy artillery destroyed the factory.

The 19th Brigade (33rd Division), under Br.-General C. R. G. Mayne, covering Meteren,¹ had a particularly hard day, being strongly attacked three times by the *81st Reserve Division*, about 8 A.M., and again about 2 P.M. and 7 P.M. In the first effort, the Germans drove in several posts in the centre, and then gradually gained a little ground and also obtained possession of the "steam mill" on the left flank, near the south-west corner of Bailleul. A counter-attack by two and a half companies of the 1/7th and 1/4th Duke of Wellington's (147th Bde) prevented them from exploiting this success. Reports were received that the XXII. Reinforcement Battalion had fallen back, and the 5/Scottish Rifles was sent up; but, although the Germans had driven in the outposts, they had not got within two hundred yards of the main line.² Another counter-attack by the 2/New Zealand Entrenching Battalion, and part of the 33rd Machine-Gun Battalion, then stopped the enemy advance, and when night fell Meteren and the ridge on which it stands were still held. During the night, men of the 5th Tank Battalion, with forty Lewis guns, arrived at the front, and whilst measures were being taken to recover the steam mill a patrol found that it had been abandoned.

Major-General Nicholson's command—the remains of the 147th, 101st, 74th, 88th, 103rd, 7th and 75th Bes (the two last formed as composite battalions), with the 102nd in support—in line from the steam mill (exclusive) through

¹ 1/Scottish Rifles, 1/Queen's and XXII. Corps Reinforcement Battalion in the line, with the 18/Middlesex (Pioneers) and the 33rd Division Machine-Gun Battalion divided between them; and the 2/New Zealand Entrenching Battalion, 4/King's (98th Brigade), 5/Scottish Rifles, 222nd Field Company R.E., and 93rd Be details in support.

Lieut.-General Godley (XXII. Corps), with headquarters at Mont Noir, but moved at this time to Steenvoorde, by Second Army orders, to make room for the IX. Corps, had on the previous day sent all available help towards Meteren: he had two reinforcement camps, the New Zealand at Abele and a British at Berthen; the troops were organized as combatants and provided with a few Lewis guns, and the units thus formed were sent up by lorry.

² Bt.-Colonel E. A. Kettlewell, a retired officer aged 65, commanding the XXII. Corps Reinforcement Battalion, received an immediate D.S.O. from General Plumer at the close of the fighting.

the suburbs of Bailleul to Crucifix Corner, was attacked by the *38th*, *11th Reserve* and *117th Divisions* and the *Alpine Corps*, all of the *II. Bavarian Corps*,¹ near Noote Boom (2 miles south of the western end of Bailleul), at 2.45 A.M. Besides the four mentioned, the *10th Ersatz* and *32nd Divisions* were in second line, and the *235th*, in the third. The orders were to capture Bailleul and Meteren.

At 4.30 A.M., a bombardment, "weak and insufficient" according to German regimental accounts, was begun, and a general attack should have followed at 7 A.M. But "machine guns hidden in hedges and ditches dominated "the field",² and, instead of a formidable advance in vastly superior numbers, there were desultory attempts at various places, only two of which deserve mention. Near Crucifix Corner, the enemy gained a footing, but was expelled, leaving a hundred prisoners and seven machine guns behind after hand-to-hand fighting, by the 9/Northumberland Fusiliers (108rd Be) and the 7th and 75th brigade-battalions, during which Lieut.-Colonel G. K. Fulton, commanding the 9/Cheshire (56th Be) was killed. The jumping-off trenches, dug during the night, in which the survivors took refuge were then obliterated by gun-fire. The 101st and 74th Bes repulsed the *Alpine Corps*, which got no further than the "Bailleul railway embankment and "station, some parties pushing as far as Knoll 45 [$1\frac{1}{2}$ miles] "south-east of Bailleul".³ From 11.30 A.M. there was little infantry activity for five hours, but the shelling never ceased, and at 4.30 P.M. another attempt at a general attack took place.⁴ Only on the front of the 74th Be, on the Mont de Lille east of Bailleul, was penetration effected, and the summit was lost; but an immediate counter-attack by the 3/Worcestershire, the battalion which had been holding the hill, drove back the Germans, who left thirty dead behind them.

¹ The *38th* was fresh, and was to relieve the *11th Reserve*; it advanced from its place of concentration. The *Alpine Corps* had been engaged for the first time on the previous afternoon.

² B.O.A., p. 487.

³ B.O.A., p. 487. The infantry regimental histories of the *Alpine Corps* are somewhat reticent about the day, but admit failure and retirement "after initial success"; they claim that Bailleul was evacuated during the night as a result of their attack. It was not evacuated until the night of the 15th/16th.

⁴ At 1 P.M. orders were received to renew the attack at 4 P.M. The companies assaulted punctually according to orders. "Regt. No. 86", p. 478.

"The new united attack planned for the afternoon did not come off." B.O.A., p. 487.

In the meantime Major-General Nicholson, alarmed at the loss of the steam mill on his right flank, had made arrangements to recover it by counter-attack. Reconnaissances to that end were made by Br.-General Craigie Halkett about 6 P.M.; but, as his line was being reorganized, after consultation between Major-Generals Nicholson and Pinney (83rd Division), the operation was abandoned. Reconnaissance in the early morning of the 15th showed, as already mentioned, that the steam mill was unoccupied, although the enemy was encountered just south of it.

During the night the 176th and 177th Bdes (59th Divn, Major-General C. F. Romer), which had reached Loere in the early morning of the 14th, relieved the troops under Major-General Nicholson, which then went into second line. They had been led and had fought magnificently, and Lieut.-General Gordon rightly considered that they deserved a rest. Should the 59th Divn have not yet sufficiently recovered from its battering in the March battle as to be able to withstand the Germans, the 34th Dn would still be in position behind it. The two brigades of the 59th Divn had been warned at 3 P.M. to carry out the relief after dark, but, owing to the German attacks at 4.30 P.M., they took up a defensive position in the second line, and did not begin to move up until after 10 P.M. Then, as the front was found too wide for them, the 469th Field Company R.E. was attached to the 176th Bde to fill the gap between it and the 19th Brigade.

The situation of the 25th Dn had not been cleared up during the night, and morning found its brigades still forming two parallel lines, with a space two thousand yards deep between them on the right, open to the enemy. The front line (100th Brigade and 148th Bde) began at Neuve Eglise—in the centre of which village the headquarters of the 2/Worcestershire were surrounded—and joined on to the 19th Dn on the left, whilst the second line, (71st Be, 6th Divn) was joined on the right to the 34th Dn, but had its left flank open.

Fortunately the enemy did not notice the gap, and until about 4.30 P.M., though there was shelling, no infantry attack took place.¹ Meanwhile, the headquarters of the

¹ The 11th Bavarian Division had been sent up on the previous evening to assist the 214th Division to take Neuve Eglise, and Ludendorff wished it put in complete for the purpose ("Fourth Army Diary", p. 101), "but the complete deployment of the numerous artillery placed at the disposal

2/Worcestershire, and the hundred men with them, besieged in the Mairie of Neuve Eglise, had fought their way out and escaped.¹ When at 4.30 P.M. the Germans advanced, Neuve Eglise now being entirely in their hands, the fragments of the five battalions in the front line, after receiving them with fire, fell back slightly to a position north of that place, where they remained until their relief early next morning.

The question of a counter-attack to recover Neuve Eglise had again been under discussion during the afternoon, and at 8.20 P.M. Major-General N. J. G. Cameron (49th Divn), who at 4 P.M. had taken command of the 25th Dn sector from Major-General Bainbridge,² gave instructions for such an attempt to be made by two battalions of the 71st Be and two of the 148th Be. At 9.15, however, as a result of a conference between Lieut.-General Gordon and Major-General Harington, General Plumer's Chief of the Staff, to which reference will be made later, orders came from the corps for the 71st Be to relieve the 7th and 75th brigade-battalions, and at 11.30 P.M. for the troops of the 25th Dn in front line to be withdrawn through the 71st Be, which would then find itself in front line.

In the 19th Dn the day could only be described as uncomfortable; for it was heavily shelled and its right flank near Neuve Eglise was in danger. However, it was only the right which was attacked, and that not in force. Soon after 4.30 P.M., when the 25th Dn, on the right, began to fall back, Major-General Jeffreys decided to withdraw during the night to his place in the line, Crucifix Corner—Wulverghem—Spanbroekmolen, as fixed by Lieut.-General Gordon in IX. Corps orders issued at 2.40 A.M. At 8 P.M., however, it appeared to him that the line near Neuve Eglise

“of the 11th Bavarian Division for the attack, to which, in addition, the I./2nd Bavarian Foot Artillery Regt. and II./1st Bavarian Reserve Foot Artillery Regt. belonged, took nearly the whole day. Besides, the heavy batteries were short of ammunition. When, at 4.30 P.M., after a short hurricane bombardment, the infantry attacked, it encountered unbroken resistance. The commander of the 11th Bavarian Division stopped the attack and postponed it until next day.” B.O.A., p. 489.

¹ 2/Lieut. (Acting Captain) J. Crowe, the adjutant, who, with a party of volunteers, first broke through at 11 A.M., and captured two machine guns which commanded the exits of the village, was awarded the V.C.

The 2/Worcestershire received a “Record” from the IX. Corps for its services (see page 212, f.n. 1).

² 25th Dn headquarters was withdrawn in anticipation of the relief of their infantry for rest and reorganization, which was begun next day.

had been finally broken, and that an immediate retirement of his right was necessary. Accordingly, after ordering the 57th Be headquarters to rally on this flank any troops which might be retiring, he swung back his right and then formed a defensive flank at its extremity which he hoped would get touch of the 71st Be in the second line of the 25th Dn, and thus close the gap. The new line was established ; but, being situated in the Douve valley, it was found to be commanded by the Neuve Eglise ridge ; at 10.15 p.m., therefore, Major-General Jeffreys, by this time aware of the gist of the corps orders in course of preparation, ordered a retirement of the whole 19th Dn to its place in the new general line, between the left flank of the 71st Be (attached 25th Dn) and the right flank of the XXII. Corps, five hundred yards south of Spanbroekmolen. There the division reorganized, with the 178th Bde, 108th Be and 58th Be (whose position was unchanged) in the line, the 57th Be in support and the 56th Be in reserve.

The IX. Corps orders, which were issued at midnight, directed the relief by the 176th and 177th Bdes of the 34th Dn and the troops attached to it, which were then to man a position north of Bailleul, between the reserve troops of the 33rd Division and the 49th Divn. This was the second of the two defensive lines which Major-General Nicholson had reconnoitred on the 13th April, known as the Meteren—Dranoutre—Kemmel line. The 19th Dn was ordered to move into the sector, mentioned above, which it had already occupied.

Thus, by the early morning of the 15th, a continuous line had been formed on the front of attack. The I. Corps, from Givenchy to Robecq, had already brought the enemy to a complete standstill ; covering Hazebrouck were two strong 12-battalion divisions, the 5th and the 1st Australian, which during the day had inflicted more than usually heavy losses on the enemy. The rest of the line, from Meteren to Wytschaete, had done well, and a definite plan was now being put into execution. A second line had been organized, manned, it is true, for the most part by very tired troops which had already fought, but at any rate offering a definite position on which the front line could retire if driven back. But further withdrawal appeared unlikely ; for in the more or less open warfare into which the fighting had developed, the enemy no longer commanded the support of a huge number of heavy batteries and inexhaustible ammunition

which he had enjoyed in trench warfare, while the British, by their better handling of field artillery and superior musketry, had shown they were more than the equal of double their numbers.

Ammunition was plentiful and the communications were good; the troops, tired but confident in the splendid resistance they had offered, never for a moment let the idea of defeat enter their minds, nor did they feel any doubt as to their ability to stop the enemy. The danger of the situation lay in the facts that the British line was uncomfortably close to the coast, and that the Germans had many divisions still in hand, and could undoubtedly gain further ground should they throw in overwhelming numbers at any one particular place.

Sir Douglas Haig had once more appealed to General Foch for help, and a conference was held at Abbeville at 11 A.M. on the 14th, at which there were present, besides the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Milner, who came from England for the purpose, Generals Foch, Weygand, Lawrence (C.G.S.) and Du Cane (chief liaison officer at General Foch's headquarters). Sir Douglas Haig, after circulating a Note on the situation drawn up by his General Staff, explained the urgent need for the French to take a more active share in the battle, demonstrating that, owing to severe losses, the British divisions were fast disappearing, and the men who remained very tired. He pointed out that the French reserves in their present position were too distant to be able to oppose, with any prospect of success, a German advance on Calais; for he maintained that the German High Command had determined to win a decisive victory, and that it was its evident intention to achieve this end by the destruction of the British Army. The German reserves, he pointed out, were intact, while the British had none, so that exhausted divisions could not be withdrawn from the front. General Foch replied by recalling the tenacity of the British at Ypres in October and November 1914: He "refused point blank to order a relief in the course of a battle; for this operation whilst in progress would immobilize both the relieving troops and the troops being relieved, at a moment when the Allied reserves were hardly sufficient in number: besides, under the threat of a powerful German attack which might be made on any part of the front, it would be a wrong employment of the French reserves which were now spread out ready to move

“ wherever the attack took place ”.¹ He reiterated that no division must be withdrawn from the battle, and asked that the British proposals might be made in writing. After some further discussion, he said that he would see what he could do when the present move northwards of the French reserves was finished. To the surprise of all he concluded by announcing, “ la bataille d’Hazebrouck est finie ”. Before the conference broke up, Sir Douglas Haig had written out and handed in his proposals. They were addressed to General Foch, and ran :

“ The situation on the front of my Armies is such that, “ in view of the state of my troops, which have been continually engaged since the 21st March, I request you to “ send the four divisions commanded by General Maistre “ [Tenth Army] to the line Béthune—Lillers. These divisions should be followed by General Micheler’s corps “ [Fifth Army].

“ The troops of General Maistre will then be situated “ where they can reinforce the British Armies either in the “ direction of the line La Bassée canal—Arras, or towards “ the line Béthune—Hazebrouck.

“ The troops of General Micheler should be disposed so “ that they can reinforce the British Army between Arras “ and the Somme.”²

To this note, General Foch, in the course of the evening, replied in writing :

“ In view of eventually supporting the British First “ Army on the front La Bassée canal—Arras or Béthune— “ Hazebrouck, the French Tenth Army has been ordered at “ once to echelon one division north of Frévent, where its “ artillery will be placed.

“ This division can thus, if it is necessary, in one day’s “ march support the fronts above mentioned, the infantry “ travelling by lorry and the artillery marching.

“ General Maistre has been invited to study a suitable position for a second division to obtain the same “ results.

“ The advance of the troops of General Micheler will be “ correspondingly prepared.”

The British Commander-in-Chief was not satisfied with the movement of one division and wrote in answer :

“ I find it necessary to place on record my opinion that

¹ Translated from F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 456.

² The original autograph note is preserved in the French archives ; there is a translation in F.O.A. vi. (i.), Annexe 1724.

“ the arrangements made by you are insufficient to meet “ the present situation ”, and, developing his argument, added that “ I am further of opinion that the strength of “ these groups [Maistre’s and Micheler’s] is insufficient. I “ trust that the movement of French reinforcements into “ the Cassel area will be continued without interruption, “ in view of the fact that the enemy is putting fresh and “ highly trained divisions from his general reserve into the “ battle on the Bailleul—Neuve Eglise front.”

General Foch, in a conversation with M. Clemenceau and Lord Milner on the following morning, gave as his reasons for failing to view the situation in the same light as Sir Douglas Haig, that “ neither the information with “ regard to the enemy originating from French G.Q.G., “ nor that received by the intermediary of the French “ Mission attached to the British Army, appeared to him “ to justify a serious modification in the disposition of the “ Allied general reserves ”. Admitting that the Germans might continue their attacks on the Nieppe—Kemmel front, he pointed out that they had now a mass of 48 divisions in reserve, larger than when they began the Flanders offensive (46 divisions on the 9th April), so that they could rapidly mount a new operation anywhere between Noyon and Arras. “ In particular, it could be argued that the “ sector between Montdidier and the Luce was most “ threatened, for there the German divisions, many of them “ fresh, are holding on the average a front of only 2,200 “ yards each, have not begun to dig in, and considerable “ activity has been observed behind the lines.”¹

Though General Foch’s decision cost the British Army many lives, and its leaders many anxious hours, in the circumstances one cannot but admire his judgment of the situation and his resistance to the very heavy pressure put upon him. The British line had been bent, not broken, and after the 9th April, when the Portuguese left the line, the progress of the enemy had been slow. Now that the 1st Australian and 5th Divisions had reached the sector where most progress had been made, the only serious danger was that the weak British divisions in the other sectors might by daily wastage become too reduced to hold their fronts. Against this could be put the enemy losses and

¹ Under 2nd April, Crown Prince Rupprecht (ii., p. 369) records, “ in “ order to leave the enemy in the dark as to our intentions, and prevent “ the troops being overworked, the attacking wing, now ordered to stand “ on the defensive, was ordered not to dig shelter trenches ”.

the difficulties of advance which increased with every day of the offensive.

At the close of the conference held at Abbeville, General Foch sent a Note to Lieut.-General Gillain (the Chief of the General Staff of the Belgian Army), requesting him to make immediate preparations to extend the front of the Belgian Army as far south as Ypres, behind the canal, and promising him some French heavy batteries. The movement was to be carried out in close co-operation with the British Second Army and at the same time as the left of that Army was brought back to its new position.

Meanwhile, General Plumer had also written to General Gillain informing him of his intention to withdraw from the positions east of Ypres. He asked him to instruct the G.O.C. of the Belgian 4th Division—the right of the Belgian Army—to conform and to act in close co-operation with the British II. Corps, the left of the Second Army. This General Gillain agreed to do.

At 1 P.M., after General Plumer had held a conference of his corps commanders at Cassel and explained the situation and his views, orders¹ were issued by the Second Army for the withdrawal to the new main position. The latter, which ran from the present battle line to Kemmel, through Voormezele (2½ miles south of Ypres) to the White Chateau (1 mile east of Ypres) and Pilkem ridge, was to be held by the IX., XXII. and II. Corps, with the left of the IX. Corps, at La Polka (500 yards east of Kemmel). The sectors of the new line were to be manned as soon as possible, but the outpost line left in position. Behind it, the front of the Battle Zone was to be held thinly as an intermediate line between the outpost line and the new position: the movements were to be carried out before the night of the 15th/16th, during which the forward and intermediate lines would be withdrawn through the new position, which would thus, on the morning of the 16th, become the front line. During the afternoon, Lieut.-General Lawrence, the Chief of the General Staff, visited General Plumer's headquarters, and, on behalf of Sir Douglas Haig, gave approval of the orders which had been issued.

A slight change had subsequently to be made. At 5 P.M. General Plumer rang up Lieut.-General Gordon, who told him that the enemy was reported to be in Neuve

Map 21.
Sketch
22.

¹ Appendix 11.

Eglise, and that the village could not be held, as General Plumer had hoped, unless a serious counter-attack were made to drive out the Germans: in any case, the salient which Neuve Eglise would make when the withdrawal to Kemmel was carried out would be difficult to retain; he therefore proposed that the IX. Corps should fall back to the line Ravelsberg—Crucifix Corner, and thence north-eastwards towards Spanbroekmolen, the left resting, not at La Polka, but at Spanbroekmolen, a mile nearer the front. This in fact had been indicated in the orders issued by him at 2.40 A.M. Before giving a final decision, General Plumer sent Major-General Harington, his chief General Staff officer, who, with Lieut.-General Godley (XXII. Corps), sat in conference, at 7.15 P.M., with Lieut.-General Gordon. The latter, whose divisional commanders were present and agreed with his views, explained the situation, and pointed out that, judging by the latest available information, a counter-attack on Neuve Eglise did not seem feasible: he had, therefore, decided not to attempt it, as it would involve losses that could ill be afforded: in any case, the village could not be retained without fresh troops: and in the event of failure there would be no organized line through which the tired units could withdraw. On his return to Army headquarters, Major-General Harington explained these reasons to General Plumer, who thereupon, at 8.30 P.M., sanctioned the withdrawal of the IX. Corps to the line selected by Lieut.-General Gordon, which movement, we have seen, was carried out.

NOTE I

THE FRENCH ON THE 14TH APRIL

The French II. Cavalry Corps made only a short march, to an area due west of St. Omer, where it spent the day. During the night of the 14th/15th, the march was resumed, and by 8 A.M. on the 15th the corps was in the neighbourhood of Steenvoorde (10 miles west of Kemmel), ready to intervene in the battle if called upon to do so. Map 20.
Sketch
22.

The 133rd Divn was concentrated about Caestre (8 miles W.N.W. of Meteren), in position to act towards Merris and Meteren. General Robillot, now in command of the French detachment (II. Cavalry Corps, 28th Division, and 133rd Divn), under General Plumer, considered that the 28th Division, which detrained at Bergues during the day, should be sent to the Flanders hills, west of Kemmel, to help in their defence, and to assist the British at all costs to retain the Ypres Salient. Between the two infantry divisions he proposed

to insert his cavalry divisions to support the centre of the line of defence of the chain of hills.

General Maistre's Tenth Army continued its march towards its destination astride the river Authie; but he found it would be impossible to reach the position Bertrancourt—Souastre (10 miles east of Doullens) on the 15th, as desired by General Foch, and for that day ordered a concentration in depth east and south of Doullens, with the leading division, 34th, pushed over the Authie, five miles ahead, near Frévent.

NOTE II

THE GERMANS ON THE 14TH APRIL

Map 20. The results of the previous three days' fighting had been so disappointing that it was not without some consideration that orders were issued to continue the offensive, whilst preparations for the attack from Houthulst Forest were being completed. The attack now was to be directed against the line of low hills on which Bailleul and Neuve Eglise stand, by the inner flanks of the *Sixth* and *Fourth Armies* acting together, the main pressure being exerted west of Bailleul. To assist this effort, the *Sixth Army* was to make an enveloping attack from the west against the high ground north of Meteren, while the *Fourth Army* was to advance towards the high ground Kemmel—Dranoutre—hills east of Bailleul. The ultimate objectives were Godewaersvelde for the *Sixth Army* and Poperinghe for the *Fourth*.

The *Sixth Army* gave to the three corps of its right wing—*II. Bavarian*, *XIX.* and *LV.*—the same objectives as before: Bailleul, Meteren, Strazeele and Nieppe Forest: the *IV. Corps* was to do no more than to make fresh preparations to capture Festubert and Givenchy. The Army met with but little success, which was not unexpected, but nevertheless disappointing to O.H.L. Quite early in the day Ludendorff came to the conclusion that the *Sixth Army* was only marking time; and in the course of the afternoon the Army itself reported to him that its offensive had, to all appearance, fizzled out, and that the troops were completely exhausted: each day the divisions were ordered to attack, but did not do so. Lieut.-Colonel von Lenz, the Chief of the Staff of the Army, therefore wished any offensive to be postponed until a proper deployment of artillery and trench mortars could be arranged, and then that attacks should be launched simultaneously all along the front. General von Kuhl, Crown Prince Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff, thought this view most regrettable, as did General von Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*; but Ludendorff accepted it and settled that the *Sixth Army* should not resume its offensive north of Nieppe Forest against Meteren and Strazeele until the 17th April, and then go forward "slowly but surely"; but that the *Fourth Army* should keep on attacking as hitherto.

At noon the Kaiser arrived at the headquarters of the *Fourth Army*. During the day the frontage of this Army was increased by taking over two divisions (*117th* and *10th Ersatz*) of the *Sixth Army*, so that its left was opposite the centre of the 34th Dn.

"The *XVIII. Reserve Corps* made a little progress opposite Wytschaete [there was no sign of advance], but the enemy was very vigilant and made constant and free use of his rifles and machine guns. The *36th Reserve Division (X. Reserve Corps)*, during the morning, repulsed a counter-attack by the British north of Neuve Eglise; but, owing to very heavy enfilade fire from the direction of Wulverghem, the attack launched by the left of this division [against the 25th Dn] did not make any progress, and orders were issued to stop it. The right flank of the *11th Bavarian Division* [opposite Neuve Eglise] mopped up several machine-gun posts, capturing in the process two officers, a hundred other ranks and two machine guns. At first, the attack by the left of the *11th Bavarian* and the right of the *117th Divisions* made a little progress, but heavy machine-gun fire soon brought it to a standstill. The left of the *117th Division* was in touch with the *II. Bavarian Corps (Sixth Army)* south of the Mont de Lille [east of Bailleul].

"In the Ypres Salient, it was ascertained that the enemy was still occupying his original positions."¹

The ill-success on this day was attributed by the chief General Staff officer of the *X. Reserve Corps* (opposite Neuve Eglise—Wulverghem) to the "really scandalously bad artillery preparation; the batteries were too far back, had no observation posts to follow the course of the battle, and fired without knowing where the enemy was".² Ludendorff therefore laid down two principles for the employment of artillery: "(1) thorough artillery preparation before, and creeping and sweeping fire during an attack; (2) allotment of batteries for the special purpose of destroying, either by fire over open sights or from covered positions with observation well to the front, obstacles which threaten to stop the infantry".

¹ The withdrawal of all but weak outposts from the foremost line must have been very well done if the enemy was thus deceived.

² A British account, however, says of this day: "The co-operation between the German infantry and artillery was excellent. As soon as the former withdrew, on each occasion it sent up two lights, and the guns immediately shortened their range again to the eastern slopes of the high ground."

CHAPTER XVI

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

15TH APRIL 1918¹

THE BATTLES OF HAZEBOUCK AND BAILLEUL (*concluded*)

EVACUATION OF BAILLEUL

(Map 21 ; Sketch 23)

Map 21. THE 15th April was a day of low cloud and some mist, Sketch but the battlefield could be pretty clearly seen with tele- 23. scopes from Mount Kemmel and from Mont Noir, where IX. Corps advanced headquarters were situated, together with so many divisional headquarters and report stations that it could be well described as " a rabbit warren of dug-outs ". Enemy air activity was again " practically nil " ; no combats took place, but 4½ tons of bombs were dropped, while thirteen reconnaissance and contact patrols were carried out by the Royal Air Force. The IX. Corps lost Ravelsberg ridge, and with it Bailleul, and fell back to its second position ; but in the areas of the I., XI. and XV. Corps, though shelling did not cease, no advantage was gained by the enemy.

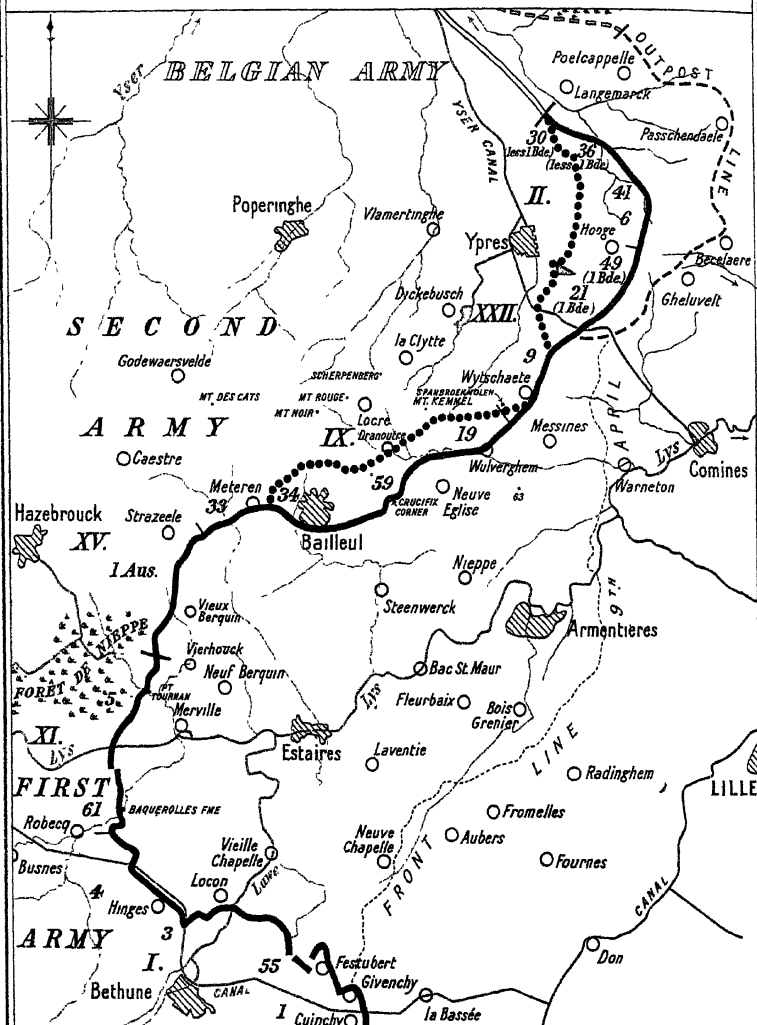
In the I. Corps sector, as Lieut.-General Holland was never disposed to let the enemy alone, there was a good deal of shelling of enemy troops moving on the roads.² The 4th Divn (Major-General T. G. Matheson) carried out two minor operations, the first being planned to gain a bridgehead by seizing Pacaut Wood. A pontoon bridge was built during the night of the 14th/15th near the south-

¹ German Summer Time began at 2 A.M. on 15th April, so thereafter in this volume German time is one hour ahead of British (Summer) time. In the narrative and Notes, however, the German time has been converted into British.

² Probably the relief of the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* by the *239th*.

Sketch 23.

THE LYS, 15TH APRIL.



REFERENCE.

Line 15th April. 16th April a.m.
 Army boundaries ... Corps boundaries.

SCALE OF YARDS

1000 0 1 2 3 4 5000 10000 15000 20000

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

western corner of the wood, and at 5.40, 5.45 and 6 P.M., after half an hour's bombardment and some assistance from the R.A.F., which dropped bombs on the wood, three columns crossed the canal. Each was formed of two companies of the 10th Bde (Br.-General H. W. Green); two were provided by the 1/R. Warwickshire and one by the 2/Duke of Wellington's. They crossed in daylight by the pontoon bridge—damaged pontoons being replaced by others brought up at a gallop, under heavy fire, by the divisional engineers—and by the Pont d'Hinges to the east and a drawbridge to the west. The Germans were apparently assembling for attack, the wood and neighbouring buildings being seen to be full of troops. After a fire fight, the attempt to seize the wood was abandoned, and the companies having lost 10 officers and 230 other ranks, dug themselves in on the northern bank just east of the wood. Secondly, more to the left, at dusk, the 1/Hampshire of the 11th Bde (4th Divn) further straightened out the re-entrant south of Baquerolles Farm, but was subsequently driven back to its original position.

In the XI. Corps, the 61st Divn and 5th Division were not much troubled, except by gas shelling of the battery positions near the St. Venant—Hazebrouck road, and of the roads through Nieppe Forest. The enemy twice showed a disposition to attack: shortly before dawn, opposite the 95th Brigade, and at 7.30 P.M., opposite the 184th Bde, but the concentrations were broken up by the combined fire of artillery, rifles, machine guns, and aeroplanes flying low. The corps received the welcome reinforcement of the 7th Cavalry Bde, which was moved up to cover St. Venant, where the divisional engineers of the 61st Divn were organizing a line.

Similarly, in the XV. Corps sector a number of minor enemy attacks were repulsed by the 1st Australian Division.

Thus far along the front, as well as in the adjoining sector of the 33rd Division, west of Bailleul, held by the 19th and 98th Brigades and various corps and divisional units, there had been comparative quiet because, as we now know, the German *Sixth Army*, whose boundary with the *Fourth* had been shifted to the west of Bailleul,¹ was under orders to restrict itself to minor local affairs until the 17th, whilst its neighbour kept up the offensive as hitherto. The attack of the *Fourth Army*, however, was, apparently, not

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

general, being confined to the sector from Bailleul (exclusive) to Crucifix Corner (inclusive), with a separate operation against Wulverghem.

In this sector there were now two positions: the front one (Bailleul—Ravelsberg—Wulverghem) more or less ready, wired, and containing many old trenches; and the second (Meteren—Kemmel), part only taped, part consisting of small posts, without wire. A third line, just north of Dranoutre, served as a switch behind the centre of the second position. All the trenches on the slopes of the hillside, many dug during the night, were clearly visible, and no attempt at camouflage had been possible. In the front line, with their right at the steam mill south-west of Bailleul, were the 176th and 177th Bdes of the 59th Divn, just arrived, the former covering Bailleul and the latter extending along the Ravelsberg ridge to Crucifix Corner. Behind them lay the six weak brigades, with a total strength of seven thousand men, under Major-General Nicholson (34th Dn), the 147th, 102nd, 74th and 103rd in the second position, and the 101st and 88th in the third. Next came the 49th Divn (formerly 25th) sector, under Major-General Cameron, with the 71st Be in the first position; the 100th Bde and 75th Be in the second; and the 148th Be, 7th Be and Wyatt's Force behind them. In the last sector, that of the 19th Dn (Major-General Jeffreys), in the first position were the 178th Bde, 108th Be (only the 12/R. Irish Rifles in front line) and the 58th Be, and in the second, the 56th and 57th Bes.

As a result of the conference held on the 14th, General Plumer's corps commanders were aware that no voluntary retirement was to be made from Bailleul or Wytschaete (just beyond the IX. Corps boundary in the XXII. Corps sector).¹ The advisability of withdrawing north of Bailleul had been discussed, for the line was of no tactical value; yet the Army commander was unwilling to abandon it for reasons of morale. If the enemy, disheartened by severe losses and failures, found that the British were withdrawing not only from the Ypres Salient but also from Bailleul, he might regain his confidence.

Neither Bailleul nor Wytschaete was attacked. The first enemy movement was made at 5 A.M. against Wulverghem, a weak spot in the Douve valley, midway between the

¹ This was formally recorded in an operation order, mainly giving information, issued at 1.20 P.M. Appendix 12.

IX. CORPS. ATTACK AGAINST 59TH DIVISION 323

Neuve Eglise and Messines ridges. No impression was made on the 178th Bde, but the very weak 12/R. Irish Rifles, caught by a bombardment as it was establishing itself in a new line, took position in some old trenches farther back, where the 1st and 9/R. Irish Fusiliers, each barely the strength of one company, came up to its help. The Ulstermen, assisted by the very effective flanking fire of the 6/Wiltshire (58th Be), on their left, which was not directly attacked, maintained their position until a general withdrawal was ordered at night in consequence of events which happened farther west.

It was not until midday that a very intense bombardment was opened against the trenches on the higher ground where Crucifix Corner was situated.¹ This bombardment spread at 2 p.m. to the right and left until it covered the whole front of the 177th Bde (Br.-General C. H. L. James) and part of those of the 176th and 71st (Br.-Generals T. G. Cope and P. W. Brown) on either side. The infantry attack followed at 2.45 p.m. Although the 176th and 177th Bdes were holding a 6,000-yards front taken over in the dusk, and were composed mainly of young soldiers under fire for the first time, only at Crucifix Corner was entry into the position effected.² The enemy was speedily ejected by a counter-attack, and, though he twice fought his way back to the high ground, it was only to be driven off each time with heavy loss by the 4/Lincolnshire and 9/Norfolk. At 3.45 p.m., after an hour's struggle, the British line was still intact. Then the Germans came on again along the whole front of the original assault and captured Mont de Lille, just east of Bailleul—where the garrison, 2/6th North Staffordshire, had been reduced by shell fire to one officer and three men. At Crucifix Corner they were kept off by fire for forty minutes but finally overwhelmed the defence. Mont de Lille was temporarily retaken by counter-attack of the supporting line of the 2/6th North and 2/6th South Staffordshire, but at 5 p.m. finally remained in enemy hands. Another attack was organized by Br.-General T. G. Cope for 7.10 p.m. from his reserves (6th/7th R. Scots Fusiliers, Pioneers), brought close up at 3 p.m. in view of their services being required. But before the named hour enemy troops, coming from Crucifix Corner, had worked their way between

¹ Here, for brevity, this ground is spoken of as "Crucifix Corner".

² The 176th and 178th Bdes of the 59th Divn, a 2nd-Line Territorial Force formation, had been nearly destroyed in the March fighting, and the 177th much weakened.

Mont de Lille and the counter-attackers; further action was thus impracticable, and the pioneers, then facing south towards Bailleul, were ordered to face east.

When, about 4.30 P.M., Crucifix Corner and the adjacent ground were secured by the enemy, he had wheeled to the left along the Ravelsberg road, and gradually swept along and in rear of the line; most of the parties of the 177th Bde, after forming defensive flanks, one after the other, were finally driven back on the pioneer battalion, the only reserve. The line, to use the words of the divisional commander, then "crumbled". For, meanwhile, the three battalions of the 176th Bde, fearing to be cut off in their positions south of Bailleul by the Germans who had captured Mont de Lille, had retired in the dark through and west of the town.¹

When it was discovered that large parties of British troops were streaming back, Lieut.-Colonel R. E. Sugden placed a piquet of the 147th Bde on the Bailleul—St. Jans Cappel road near the 176th Bde headquarters, a thousand yards north of the town. Here a few hundred men were rallied about 8 P.M., and others of the 177th were collected near their brigade headquarters on the Bailleul—Locre road. With the pioneers, these parties were then spread out in a line, the rest of the survivors being allowed to pass on through the 84th Dn position. Two companies of the 108rd Be were sent out by Major-General Nicholson's orders to cover the retirement and hold off the enemy.

The work of organizing the defence of the Meteren—Kemmel line was now much hampered by strong enemy patrols which attacked the covering parties. In V-shape formation and firing signal lights, they pushed through gaps until, in the general confusion, it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe. But the six brigades under Major-General Nicholson maintained their position. Suspecting that Germans would collect on the open ground near the asylum at the north-eastern corner of Bailleul, Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie, commanding the IX. Corps

¹ All German accounts agree that Bailleul was not entered until very late on the 15th; most say not until the 16th. "Regt. No. 369" (*10th Ersatz Division*), which lay south of the town, states: "during the night '15th/16th patrols of the 8th Company discovered for certain that the 'southern part of the town had been evacuated by the enemy, the centre 'of the regiment therefore pressed on" (p. 114). The town was then encircled on its eastern and western sides, and at 1 P.M. (on the 16th), the *370th Regt.* was detailed to clear it (p. 115). The divisional order on the morning of the 16th began, "The enemy seems to be evacuating Bailleul". ("Regt. No. 370", p. 291.)

Heavy Artillery, ordered the area to be shelled, and next day an aviator reported that hundreds of bodies were lying there.

About 8 P.M. information of the state of affairs reached Mont Noir, the headquarters of the 59th Divn (Major-General C. F. Romer) and the advanced headquarters of the IX. Corps, whereupon Lieut.-General Gordon gave formal orders for the 176th and 177th Bdes to be withdrawn through the troops under the 34th Dn and concentrated in corps reserve at Locre. Br.-General Cope was at the front and did not return to his headquarters, then under hot fire, until 10.30 P.M., when, after reporting the state of his troops by telephone and receiving his orders, he withdrew the survivors of both brigades who were still in the 34th Dn line, leaving some three hundred men of the 5/North Staffordshire and his trench-mortar battery at the disposal of Lieut.-Colonel Sugden.

It remains to relate what happened to the troops immediately on the right and left of the gap caused by the retirement of the 176th and 177th Bdes. West of Bailleul, the day passed quietly in the left sector of the 33rd Division, held by the 2/New Zealand Entrenching Battalion and 1/Middlesex, with the 467th Company R.E. and 18/Middlesex (Pioneers) in support. When, at 7 P.M., Major-General Pinney saw the enemy's lights going up on Ravelsberg ridge, he communicated with Second Army headquarters and, receiving approval, issued orders at 8.50 P.M., after the 176th Bde had got clear of Bailleul, for the troops in the left sector to swing into a switch connecting the front and second positions. This they succeeded in doing, although, before 10 P.M., enemy patrols were working west of Bailleul.

On the left, after the enemy had reached Crucifix Corner, the 71st Be had formed a defensive flank, which it was still holding at 6.50 P.M. when Br.-General Brown received orders from Major-General Cameron, issued fifty-five minutes earlier, to make a counter-attack for the recapture of Crucifix Corner. One of his reserve companies was to be used, together with a composite battalion of the 100th Bde; but in view of the retirement of the whole of the 177th Bde, these orders were cancelled and Br.-General Brown was told to extend his defensive flank. Later, towards 9.30 P.M., came news of the orders for the retirement of the 176th and 177th Bdes through the 34th Dn, and Major-General Cameron gave instructions to the 71st

Be and the composite battalion to retire to the Meteren—Kemmel line (second position). The movement was begun at 1 A.M., the composite battalion joining Wyatt's Force and the 71st Be becoming the latter's reserve.

Next on the left, Major-General Jeffreys (19th Dn) during the early evening had warned the brigadiers that preparations should be made for a retirement. At 10.45 P.M., in consequence of instructions received from the IX. Corps,¹ he ordered a retirement of his troops to a switch line between the front and second position, running from Lindenhoek (south of Kemmel) to the corps boundary south of Wytschaete, which was done without interference. To keep connection, the 9th Dn threw back a defensive flank. Thus a complete line of retrenchment had been formed behind the evacuated front Bailleul—Wulverghem.

In the Ypres Salient the day passed quietly and the withdrawal of the troops of the XXII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley) and the II. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Jacob)—that is the 30th Divn (Major-General W. de L. Williams), less 89th Bde, the 36th Divn (Major-General O. S. W. Nugent), less 108th Be, the 41st Divn (Major-General Sir S. T. B. Lawford), the 6th Divn (Major-General T. O. Marden), less 71st Be sent to Kemmel, the 146th Bde of the 49th Divn (Br.-General G. A. P. Rennie) and the 110th Be of the 21st Dn (Br.-General H. R. Cumming)—was carried out under cover of the artillery and of the outposts, which remained in the old front line.² On the representation of Lieut.-General Godley, General Plumer gave permission for the front of the old Battle Zone to be held as an advanced position for as long as possible after the withdrawal of the outpost line at 4 A.M. on the 16th April, in order to give further time to prepare the line of resistance.

During the morning, the Adjutant-General (Lieut.-General Sir G. H. Fowke) reported that the infantry losses since 21st March amounted to 7,408 officers and 188,000 other ranks, the total of all arms up to the night of the 14th being 210,000; 171,000 men had been received in the base hospitals and 98,000 already in the hospitals evacuated to

¹ These instructions were repeated in formal orders issued at midnight (Appendix 13), and covered by Second Army orders issued at 1 A.M. on the 16th (Appendix 14).

² The artillery for the defence of the Salient was distributed in depth, the bulk of the guns being in "silent" positions, with the rest as "active" batteries for day and night work.

England: the reinforcements arriving from home from the 27th March to the 14th April were 114,720 of all arms: the state of the 49 British divisions was as follows:

23	average	900	other ranks per battalion		
7	„	800-900	other ranks per battalion		
8	„	below 800	„	„	
6	„	„	600 ¹	„	„
5	exist as cadres only.	2			

The War Office had promised 25,000 more reinforcements during April.

The Q.M.G. (Lieut.-General Travers Clarke) reported that supply arrangements were working well: that an officer from French G.Q.G. had visited him desiring to take control of all the British supply arrangements: failing to accomplish his purpose, he had tried to extract a promise that all French troops in the British area should be supplied: all that could be said was that the utmost would be done to feed all French troops fighting in the British area, but as food was being allotted by an International Board, there must be an understanding that repayment in kind should be made later.

The Field Censor reported, judging from letters written home, that the morale of the troops was extremely good: "it can safely be said that it has never been higher", and that "grousing" had ceased. Rumour had it that the improvement in morale was chiefly due to the cessation of trench fatigues.

There were no further discussions between General Foch and Sir D. Haig on this day; but Lieut.-General Du Cane (Chief Liaison Officer) informed the latter that General Foch still maintained his opinion that "*la bataille d'Hazebrouck est finie*". The Commander-in-Chief was informed from London that General Foch had been granted the title of General-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in France: "this does not in any way alter your relative position as arranged".

The French contingent under General Robillot had now come close enough—the II. Cavalry Corps having covered 120 miles in 60 hours—to be available for service on the 16th on a line between Hazebrouck and Poperinghe. The 133rd Divn was still grouped around Caestre (3 miles

¹ 25th, 31st, 34th, 40th, 50th, 51st.

² 14th, 16th, 30th, 39th, 66th.

north-east of Hazebrouck); the 2nd and 6th Cavalry Divisions by 8 A.M. lay in front of Steenvoorde, north of the 133rd; the 3rd Cavalry Division was north of Cassel; and the 28th Division was completing assembly on the left of the cavalry.

General Plumer had already come to an agreement with General Robillot that this French force should at an early date relieve some of the tired British troops, and in the evening he proposed to use the 133rd Divn to occupy a sector in the Meteren area. General Foch, being informed of this, expressed his disapproval, and telegraphed to Colonel Desticker, his liaison officer with the Second Army: "no engagement on this subject should be made: the French troops in the north are intended for the battle (pour aller à la bataille); on principle the relief is out of the question". On hearing this, General Plumer felt obliged to cancel the arrangements made with General Robillot. The 21st Divn artillery, however, which had entrained on the 13th at Doullens, detraining at Godewaersvelde on the 14th, had been attached to the French 133rd Divn, which had no horses for its guns, and went into action in the afternoon near Flêtre and Caestre to support the 33rd Division, General Robillot, as the man on the spot, having seen fit to disregard Foch's instructions. In accordance with the orders issued at 1 A.M. on the 16th by General Plumer, the 133rd Divn was preparing to take over the sector of the 33rd Division covering Meteren, whilst the two leading regiments of the 28th Division, with two brigades of artillery, were pushed forward during the night to Westoutre—Reninghelst (3 miles north-west of Kemmel). Thus the two French divisions were close to the sector where they were wanted on the 16th. At General Plumer's special request, made by telephone at 1 A.M., that some mounted troops should move forward towards Boeschepe (3½ miles north of Meteren) in the morning, General Robillot issued orders for two brigades of cavalry to be in position there by 7 A.M.

Of the French reserves, during the 15th April, the Tenth Army (Maistre) reached the position assigned to it: three divisions (14th, 129th and 154th) in line east of, and one (34th) north of Doullens. Two more divisions (31st and 32nd) of the Fifth Army (Micheler) remained in the western suburbs of Amiens, and two more (46th and 47th) arrived by lorry in areas 15 and 30 miles, respectively, west of Amiens.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 15TH APRIL

Previous to the operations of this day, the sector controlled by Map 21. the *II. Bavarian Corps* headquarters, which was considered to have failed, was divided, the northern part, with the *117th*, *32nd*, and *10th Ersatz Divisions*, being handed over to the headquarters staff of the *Guard Reserve Corps*, just arrived from Russia, and transferred to the *Fourth Army*; while the smaller southern part, with the *38th*, *81st Reserve* and *11th Reserve*, the *Alpine Corps* being brought into reserve, was allotted to the *III. Bavarian Corps* headquarters, which had come from the Scarpe, where the *II.* replaced it.

Crown Prince Rupprecht gave detailed instructions for the capture of Bailleul; the *Fourth Army* was to encircle the town on the north and east, and the *Sixth Army* on the south and west. The later objectives for the *Sixth Army* would be Berthen (4 miles N.N.W. of Bailleul), and for the *Fourth Army*, St. Jans Cappel (2 miles north of Bailleul) and Mont Noir.

Once more, the *Sixth Army* renewed its orders of the 18th April, in which the objectives for the *III. Bavarian* and *XIX. Corps* were Meteren and Strazeele, but, in the end, it postponed the execution of the attack in order to permit of more thorough preparation.

The *Fourth Army* headquarters allotted the task of encircling Bailleul to the *Guard Reserve Corps*, opposite the *176th* and *177th Bdes*; the *X. Reserve Corps*, north of it, was to retain the task of pushing forward against the line Kemmel—Dranoutre; whilst the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* was to make further preparations for an attack on Wytschaete and to capture Wulverghem.

The *Fourth Army* diary describes the events of the day thus: "During the morning, the left of the *49th Reserve Division (XVIII. Reserve Corps)* captured Wulverghem and the hostile positions north-east of the village. . . . At 3 p.m., under the orders of the *X. Reserve Corps*, the *11th Bavarian*, *117th* and *32nd Divisions* attacked in order to capture the line of hills, Zwartemolenhoek [a mile north-west of Neuve Eglise], Sebasto [the high ground about Crucifix Corner], Ravelsberg, Mont de Lille. The attack was highly successful; all along our front we got to within 300–800 metres south of the Bailleul—Wulverghem railway, and during the night the *32nd Division* even managed to push some troops across the railway. The enemy resisted desperately."

Crown Prince Rupprecht records:

"I went to the headquarters of the *Seventeenth Army*. Everywhere I heard complaints about the difficulty of finding shelter for man and beast in the completely devastated area, and about the heavy losses caused by bombing attacks, especially in horses, which had no protection even from view in their lines. . . . When I reached Mons I heard of the progress made by the left wing of the *Fourth Army*. I got the impression that the enemy had fallen back voluntarily at Wytschaete and Wulverghem, perhaps to a position running from St. Eloi, along Kemmel and north of the Douve."

CHAPTER XVII

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

16TH APRIL 1918

THE LOSS OF METEREN AND WYTSCHAETE

(Maps 14, 22 ; Sketch 24)

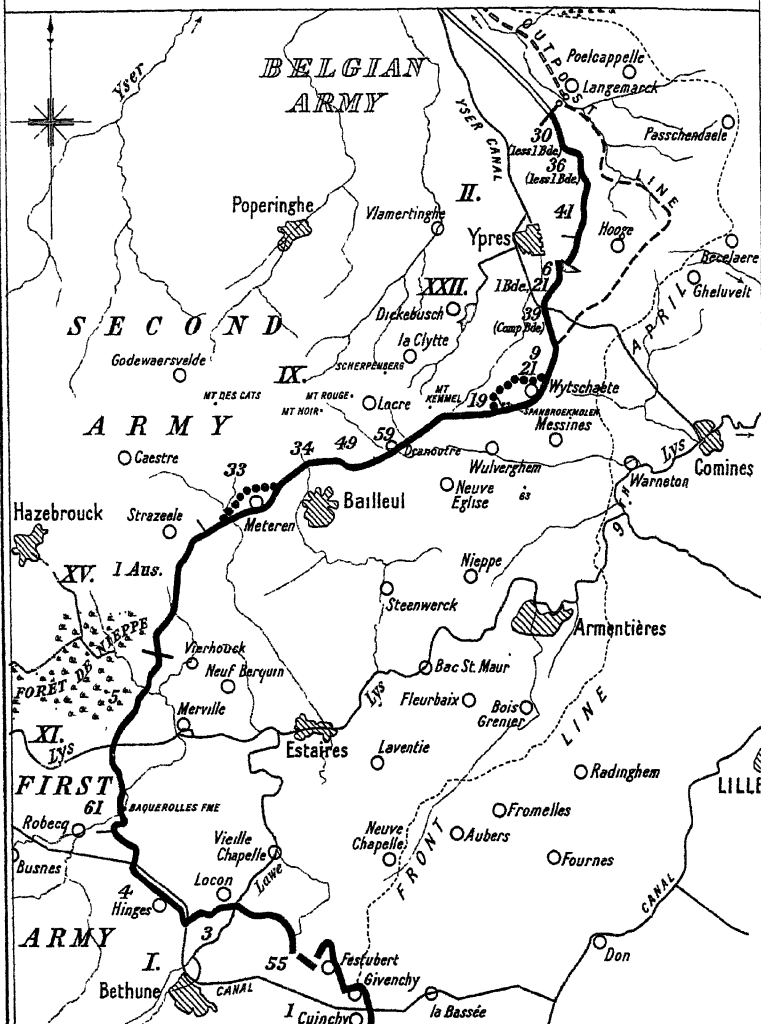
Map 22. WHEN the morning of the 16th April dawned there was a heavy mist, but it cleared about 10 A.M. and turned to rain. **Sketch 24.** Very little flying was possible, but $2\frac{3}{4}$ tons of bombs were dropped in the twenty-four hours. Enemy air activity was even less than on the previous day. In spite of much shelling there was no general attack, the Germans concentrating their efforts on the sectors around Meteren and Wytschaete, important tactical points, both of which they won.

Nothing of note happened on the fronts of the I., XI. and XV. Corps except that the 1st Australian Division, in spite of bombardment, improved a little the situation of its line, and at night took over the 2,500-yard sector of the 5/Scottish Rifles (33rd Division) on its left.

In the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Gordon), the front of the 33rd Division, covering Meteren, was held by the 5/Scottish Rifles, above mentioned ; the 4/King's (98th Brigade) ; part of the 18/Middlesex (Pioneers) ; the Machine-Gun Battalion (less one company, with some of its guns distributed in pairs to enfilade the front, and others in battery west of Meteren) ; and the Lewis gunners of the 5th Tank Battalion. The whole defence was well disposed in depth ; the left had been drawn back during the night into a switch connected to the line behind Bailleul to which the 59th Divn had fallen back. The 2/New Zealand Entrenching Battalion was in reserve close to Meteren. Towards 5 A.M. a gap was reported beyond the left flank, and two platoons were sent to fill it, but it was too late. At 5.20 A.M.,

Sketch 24.

THE LYS, 16TH APRIL.



REFERENCE.

Line 16th April..... 17th April a.m.....
 Army boundaries..... Corps boundaries.....

SCALE OF YARDS

1000 0 1 2 3 4 5000 10000 15000 20000

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Germans, advancing without a bombardment, drove in the left flank on Meteren, annihilated the left company of the 4/King's, and thus forced the rest of the front line on that wing to retire on the village.¹

By 9.30 A.M., in the clearing fog, the Germans had swept away resistance and cut off one of the companies of the New Zealand Entrenching Battalion which had moved out in front of Meteren. It was the largest capture of New Zealanders in the whole War, and this success enabled the enemy to occupy the ruins of the village. Only a few days before, it had still presented its pre-war appearance, with the inhabitants going about as usual: it now was little better than a mass of rubble, with a machine gun firing from the stump of its church tower. Br.-General J. D. Heriot-Maitland (98th Brigade) ordered up the 1/Middlesex, in reserve three miles to the north, to retake Meteren. But by 11 A.M. the enemy was pushing south-westwards from the village against the survivors of the original front line; so when, at 1 P.M., the counter-attack at last took place, through a gap between the New Zealanders and the King's, the Middlesex could do no more than reach the northern side of Meteren. For a time it seemed that the Germans must break through. In due course, however, a new line was formed along the northern edge of Meteren which joined the switch line, previously mentioned, on the east: but a gap remained at the western end between the village and the 5/Scottish Rifles, which for its part had beaten off all attacks by Lewis-gun and rapid rifle fire.² About 4.30

¹ There is a lengthy account, with a sketch map, of this attack in "Regt. No. 96", pp. 479-83. Early in the morning, in the fog, the *II.* and *III. Battalions* being in the line, patrols of the regiment (part of the *38th Division*) found that the British line in front of them had been withdrawn (to form the flank). At 7.50 A.M. information arrived at regimental headquarters that the *95th Regt.*, on its right, was going forward with strong patrols, having found Bailleul evacuated, and the *II./96th* was co-operating. The regimental commander immediately ordered his battalions to push on, pass by the east of Meteren and take it from the north. Meanwhile, the commander of the *III. Battalion* had independently come to the decision to push on, and at 8.10 A.M. his companies assaulted towards the extreme eastern end and eastwards of Meteren. The *II. Battalion* came up on the right, and later the *I. Battalion* on the left, straight at Meteren. The regiment lost on this day, 61 killed and 179 wounded. It took prisoner 14 officers and 575 other ranks and 45 machine guns. It claims in error that it was attacked by three tanks, "which got within 200 metres of our front and then had to turn about"! Perhaps it captured some of the Lewis gunners wearing Tank Corps badges, and from that fact imagined tanks to be present. It was awarded 6 Iron Crosses I. Class and 264 II. Class for the day's work.

² The battalion had shortly before gone through an intensive course in rapid fire whilst in reserve near Arras.

P.M., two sections of the 11th Field Company R.E., in support of the left of the 4/King's, made a counter-attack on a farm half a mile west of Meteren, bayoneting thirty Germans and capturing eighteen with three machine guns. This brilliant little episode stabilized a situation which was becoming dangerous.¹

North of Bailleul the six tired brigades under Major-General Nicholson (34th Dn), owing to the retirement of the 59th Divn, were again in the front line. Theirs was no enviable position, exposed as it was to enemy view with no cover except shallow trenches, without any wire. They were, however, supported by the 38th Divn artillery, which had returned from the 57th Divn, and by one brigade and a battery from the 36th Divn artillery, besides some heavy artillery. At first no enemy bodies larger than patrols attempted to penetrate the line, but after 10.30 A.M. several large concentrations of Germans were dealt with by the artillery and broken up. From Bailleul itself the enemy made no attempt to advance; the town indeed was made untenable for him by heavy gunfire, and looked, as it was said, like a cinema picture of the Great Fire of London, with steeples and houses crashing down one by one into a sea of smoke and flame. In view of the paucity of reserves, Lieut.-General Gordon placed the 7th and 75th Bes (25th Dn), organized as the 7th Composite Brigade of two battalions, at Major-General Nicholson's disposal.

It was not until 4 P.M. that an attack took place. Then, after a short, severe bombardment, the *10th Ersatz*, *32nd*, and *117th Divisions* advanced against Major-General Nicholson's force and the right of the 100th brigade-battalion, next to it.² The three German divisions were greeted by the fire of heavy and field artillery directed from Mont Noir (where, in one large dug-out there were several brigade headquarters and a divisional report centre), besides small-arms fire, and their attack was crushed. Only against the 147th Bde, astride the Bailleul—St. Jans Cappel road, and

¹ The number of attackers is estimated in "Regt. No. 96" as two companies with three tanks.

² These three divisions belonged to the *Guard Reserve Corps*, now the left formation of the *Fourth Army*, which was to attack whilst the *Sixth Army* on its left stood fast. See Note at end of Chapter. The orders given in "Regt. No. 370" (*10th Ersatz Division*), p. 291, run, "the enemy seems to be evacuating Bailleul; 32nd and 117th Divisions are advancing. The 10th Ersatz Division will follow the retreating enemy closely, but "without getting involved in street fighting."

against the 74th Be astride the Locre road, did the enemy get near the British line. No more than sixteen prisoners were collected, but many dead Germans were found.¹ Minor attacks on the 34th Dn were continued until late in the evening, and no less than five separate thrusts were made against the 100th brigade-battalion, which had one company of the 33rd Machine-Gun Battalion with it, and against the 9/Northumberland Fusiliers (34th Dn), on its right. The latter had the additional support of the artillery of the French 28th Division, on the hillside near Mont Rouge. The defence was never broken, and when fighting ceased, the line still remained intact.

The remaining sector of the IX. Corps front, which extended to Spanbroekmolen, was held by Wyatt's Force and the XXII. Corps Cyclist Battalion, under the 49th Divn, with the 148th and 71st Bes, Otago Mounted Rifles and the divisional engineers in support; the 178th Bde (59th Divn); and the 19th Dn. It is stated to have been attacked by the *11th Bavarian* and *36th Reserve Divisions*, of the *X. Reserve Corps*, "in liaison" with the advance of the *Guard Reserve Corps* to the south;² but no heavy fighting was reported except on the extreme left of the 19th Dn, which became involved in the battle of the XXII. Corps.

In the sector of the XXII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley), which extended from Spanbroekmolen to the Menin road, in front of Ypres, a hurricane bombardment, with much gas, was opened in the fog at 4.30 A.M. against the whole front of the 9th Dn (Major-General H. H. Tudor). This division, which covered over nine thousand yards of front, and formed the right wing of the corps, was in reality composed of the 146th (part), 62nd, and 64th Bdes and 26th and 27th Bes of the 49th, 21st and 9th Dns. All communications were quickly destroyed, and, owing to

Map 22.
Sketch
24.

¹ The history of "Regt. No. 157", a very brief one, states on p. 56 that the attack on the 16th failed before "the bitter enemy resistance" in spite of the "death-despising attack".

"Regt. No. 370", p. 292, says "the fighting had cost heavy losses; the old nucleus of war-experienced leaders and men had fallen or were wounded. The number of dead was out of all proportion, they had given their lives cheerfully in storming forward. The total cannot be given, as the regimental diaries are missing." It is then mentioned that the 7th Company, which was 90 strong, had 24 killed and 38 wounded, and that the 1. Battalion was down to 197 men. This regiment received only one Iron Cross.

² Fourth Army Diary, p. 143.

the recent transfer of the 9th Dn from the IX. to the XXII. Corps, it was left for some time without heavy artillery support, and in consequence the enemy's rearward areas opposite were not fired on.

The enemy's assault, at 5.30 A.M., was delivered in fog, which still persisted, thickened by the gas and the smoke of the bombardment. The left wing of the attackers had to advance up the very gentle slopes of the long ridges leading to the summits of Spanbroekmolen and Wytschaete, between which there is a slight depression, and its approach was detected by patrols. Here the defenders in front line, the 7/West Yorkshire (146th Bde) and 1/Lincolnshire (62nd Bde), faced by the greater part of two divisions (*49th Reserve* and *17th Reserve*), checked the enemy by fire, with the help of the 156th and 162nd Brigades of the 33rd Division artillery, but were eventually overwhelmed by superior numbers.¹ Spanbroekmolen and Wytschaete, and the great craters made in June 1917 between them, were captured.² Part of the 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers (62nd) next on the north was involved, and its right was swung back, with the addition of five machine guns, to form a defensive flank, which was subsequently further strengthened, under directions from Br.-General G. H. Gater (62nd). The assault of the German right wing (*7th Division*) over the flat ground north of Wytschaete, intersected with old trenches, against the 1/East Yorkshire and 15/Durham L.I. (64th Bde) and the 5/Cameron Highlanders (26th Be), the odds being less in its favour, completely failed, and Br.-General H. R. Headlam (64th Bde) was able to send men to the threatened flank.

All communications had been cut, and the headquarters of the battalions had become involved in the fighting, so that they could not report until 9 A.M. An hour earlier, however, it had become clear to Major-General Tudor, whose headquarters were on the Scherpenberg (2 miles north-west of Kemmel), that Spanbroekmolen and Wytschaete had been lost: he ordered an immediate counter-attack from the north by the reserve battalions of the 26th Be and 62nd Bde, and a battalion of the 39th Dn Composite

¹ The batteries fired until the enemy was close upon them: those of the 162nd Brigade were then forced to withdraw, but got all their guns away one by one during pauses in the fire.

² Spanbroekmolen was marked by the enormous crater, now a lake, blown in the battle of Messines 1917. A thousand yards north of it were the twin "Peckham" craters.

Brigade, which was at his disposal.¹ Before it could be organized, the mist lifted, and the movement was temporarily abandoned; but at 11 A.M. two of the battalions (2/Lincolnshire of the 62nd Bde, and one of the 39th Composite Brigade), well supported by the 33rd Division artillery, established themselves in a line on the slopes of the ridge a thousand yards west of Wytschaete. The enemy seemed contented with his gains and, though he maintained a heavy fire, made no further effort to advance.²

At 11.20 A.M. Major-General Tudor reported the situation in detail to the XXII. Corps, adding that Wytschaete was ringed on the west and north, but that the line was weak. On this information reaching General Plumer, the latter, after giving out a preliminary warning,³ at 1 P.M. issued, with General Robillot's agreement, formal orders for a counter-attack to be made at 6 P.M. by the two French divisions, in conjunction with the IX. and XXII. Corps.⁴ On the left flank, the 28th Division (General Madelin), in close connection with the British, was to attack, within fixed limits, in a general S.S.E. direction towards Messines, in order to establish a line on the Wulverghem—Wytschaete spur, the XXII. Corps simultaneously attacking the German right. On the right flank, the 133rd Divn (General Valentin) was to attack, also in a general S.S.E. direction, towards Bailleul, in order to capture Meteren and the hill north of the village, if in enemy possession. The IX. Corps, with the assistance of the French 2nd and 6th Cavalry Divisions, was to form a

¹ The 39th Dn Composite Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Hubback) had come into the line, under the 21st Dn, just north of the 9th Dn on the previous day.

² The German attack was carefully prepared, with the code name of "April Sun". According to the regimental history of "Regt. No. 163", which has a lengthy account, pp. 310-16, with sketch map, the attack was made by the 228th Res. Regt. (49th Reserve Division) against Spanbroekmolen; the 17th Reserve Division up to and including Wytschaete; and the 7th Division north of Wytschaete. The sketch shows the 226th, another regiment of the 49th Reserve Division, interpolated in the middle of the front of the 17th Reserve Division. The narrative states: "The enemy seemed to suspect an attack. At 2.30 A.M. he dropped heavy artillery fire of light and medium calibre on the storm troops. . . . The night was dark. The attack began at 4.50 A.M. and was received everywhere by heavy fire, so that at first it wavered." Reserves were then brought up. When the crest of the ridge was reached, as there was no longer any artillery support, the advance ceased and at 2 P.M. orders were issued by the 17th Reserve Division, "in view of the position of neighbouring troops" and the general situation "to make no further advance."

³ Boullaire, p. 283, says General Robillot received the warning at 9 A.M.

⁴ Appendix 15.

link between the two attacks and protect the right of the 28th Division. In rear, the IX. Corps was made responsible for the defence of Kemmel and the French II. Cavalry Corps for that of the Mont des Cats and Mont Noir.

At the same time as General Robillot received General Plumer's orders a telegram reached him from General Foch: "It is the duty of the French troops to hasten to the battle wherever it is engaged. The Germans attacked Wytschaete this morning, and should be between Kemmel and Neuve Eglise."

On receipt of General Plumer's decision, at 11 A.M. Lieut.-General Godley instructed Major-General Tudor by telephone that the 9th Dn should prolong the left of the French attack from the N.N.W., while a composite force, under Br.-General C. H. L. James (177th Bde),¹ protected its right; also that a second counter-attack should be made from the north of Wytschaete. The troops were detailed and the barrages arranged, but at 5.10 P.M., when all was ready and the infantry in position, Lieut.-General Godley, who was visiting the 28th Division headquarters at that time, had to telephone to the 9th Dn that the French would not be able to counter-attack until 7.30 P.M. At 6 P.M. came a further message that the French attack would be made by three battalions, which had been instructed to advance until the enemy was met. At 6.20 P.M. a staff officer of the 9th Dn, sent to the 28th Division headquarters to settle points of detail, telephoned that the French were unable to say definitely if the attack, postponed to 7.30 P.M., would take place at all. In point of fact, it did not. Nevertheless, Major-General Tudor determined to carry out his share of the operation. From the west, the 2/Lincolnshire and the battalion of the 39th Composite Brigade almost reached the German line; but they did not make good the Peckham craters, and, enfiladed from Spanbroekmolen which the French should have attacked, suffered heavy losses. The troops hung on until 5 A.M. on the 17th, when, as it was seen that they could not remain in the position in daylight, they were withdrawn to the line about a thousand yards from Wytschaete. In the north, the 7/Seaforth Highlanders (26th Be) and one and a half battalions of the 39th Composite Brigade, though they lost the advantage of the barrage by five minutes, penetrated into Wytschaete Wood, lying on the north-western side of

¹ 2/4th Leicestershire, 6th/7th R. Scots Fusiliers and 469th Field Company R.E.

the village. Supported by the South African Be (650 strong), gradually sent up during the night, they formed a line just clear of the northern edge of Wyttschaete. As the left of the 19th Dn had been drawn back to run northwards, a gap between it and the 9th Dn had arisen; this was filled by two companies of the 58th Be, and the ring round Wyttschaete was thus complete.

The counter-attack of the French 133rd Divn, in the south, to recover Meteren was launched on a front of two battalions (32nd and 116th Chasseurs à pied), but did not get beyond the British line south-west of Meteren, where the leading waves halted, filling gaps in the front. During the night, after reorganization, they took over a two-battalion sector.¹

The 1st Australian Battalion, which had orders to co-operate with the attack of the 133rd Divn and cover its right, duly moved off, and in spite of a heavy barrage, by 10 P.M. had established a line from the XV. Corps boundary to the Meteren Becque, in touch with the 4/King's, beyond which were the French. The Australians then relieved the 5/Scottish Rifles, except in the extreme left sector, which the Scots continued to hold, in spite of reduced numbers, as evidence of good will. Thus Meteren also was enclosed.

On the remainder of the front of the XXII. Corps, and on that of the II. Corps, the withdrawal in the Ypres sector was completed by 4 A.M. without difficulty and apparently unnoticed. Patrols were sent out in the morning to discover what the enemy was about and found he had not approached the front line. A patrol of the 16th Bde surprised and captured an artillery officer who was examining his map; he was reconnoitring for O.P.'s and had no idea where the British line was. It was not until between 4 and 5 P.M. that the Germans began to advance in considerable numbers. They were checked by the weak forces acting as outposts to the main defence line, many being shot down at close range.²

In the course of the day, Sir Douglas Haig's arguments

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 455, says "the attacks made in the evening of 16th April did not give the results expected; they only consolidated the British front in the sectors concerned. In any case, the relief of part of the worn-out troops of General Plumer was an absolute necessity." Boullaire, p. 284, states that a telephone message (there is no record of such a message in the Second Army files) was received at 4.10 P.M.: "Order to relieve the British troops by the 28th and 133rd Divisions", and adds, "In these conditions, it was necessary to cancel all offensive action and prepare the reliefs".

² *Fourth Army Diary*, p. 142, says, "our advanced patrols ascertained

seemed at last to have had an effect on General Foch. At 10.15 A.M. he asked General Pétain to have another division in readiness to move to Flanders, and he ordered the Tenth Army to make preparations to despatch its advanced division (34th) by lorry to the same destination: when this division left, the 31st and 32nd Divisions of the Fifth Army, lying west of Amiens, were to cross the Somme and be transferred to the Tenth Army.

At a conference held at Abbeville at 4.30 P.M.¹ the Commander-in-Chief described the situation of the Second Army, and strongly urged the need for sending reinforcements to it without delay. He advised that complete inundations covering St. Omer—Dunkirk should be created forthwith, and that “reliable” troops should be sent to hold the points of passage and study the approaches to them. General Foch said that he had given orders on the 12th for the inundation by fresh water, that is by blocking the river Aa, to be begun.² General Wilson replied that this was quite inadequate and the full inundation should be formed at once. After some discussion, General Foch, saying that he would see the situation for himself, left for Second Army headquarters, whither General Robillot was summoned. To General Plumer he gave an hour’s lecture on the tactical methods by which Mount Kemmel should be held, ending with his usual advice, “hold on to the front line and “organize second lines; in these latter points d’appui “should be fixed with precision; the garrisons of these “points d’appui should be in proportion to their importance, and should work to put them in a state of defence”. But he promised one French division should be sent to the Second Army, and “towards 11 P.M. he telephoned an “order for the movement in lorries of the 34th Division “on Steenvoorde, to begin at 6 A.M.”³

“in the course of the afternoon the withdrawal of the enemy”. Page 146 gives 4.40 P.M. as the time of receipt of the first report from the *Guard Corps* to the Army.

¹ The conference was assembled at the request of Sir D. Haig to Lord Milner, as, although their advance in Flanders had been partially stopped, the Germans were still attacking in force, the French reinforcements were slow in arriving, and the situation remained extremely critical.

There were present: Generals Foch and Weygand; Lord Milner and Sir H. Wilson; Sir D. Haig; Lieut.-General Sir H. Lawrence, and Lieut.-General Sir J. Du Cane.

² This inundation, which was shallow, but covered a good deal of ground, extended from St. Omer to Gravelines. See Map 14.

³ F.O.A. vi. (1), p. 458, which, by mistake, gives the 17th at 11 P.M., not the 16th, as the time of issue of the orders.

The French Third and First Armies, respectively 11 and 19 divisions strong, had remained on the line Noyon—Montdidier—Hangard (the junction with the British, 6 miles south of the Somme) since the 28th March. They were faced on the southern flank of the German salient by Hutier's *Eighteenth Army* (37 divisions), and did not move.¹

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 16TH APRIL

No special orders were given to either Army for the 16th April. Map 22. The *Sixth Army*, in accordance with Ludendorff's decision, was to stand fast; but, as has been seen, it took advantage of the opportunity offered by the evacuation of Bailleul to capture Meteren. The *Fourth Army* continued the offensive with its three corps of the left wing: *Guard Reserve*, *X. Reserve* and *XVIII. Reserve*, from Bailleul (inclusive) to beyond Wytschaete; of this movement some details have been given.

The chief interest centred in the *Guard Corps* between the Ypres canal at Comines and Houthulst Forest. As late as the afternoon of the 16th, this corps was still ignorant of the withdrawal of the British and was busily continuing its preparations to attack on the 20th, Ludendorff recommending that the divisions should not be given very narrow frontages. Quite suddenly, late in the afternoon, the headquarters of the corps received information that its left divisions (*58th* and *236th*) had entered the British positions.

The fact that the British had actually retreated—although he had foreseen the possibility—took the commander of the *Guard Corps* by surprise. His first impulse was to attack at once south-west of Houthulst Forest with such units as he had in line; but he decided later, in accordance with the views of the Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, to launch on the 17th the attack arranged for the 20th.

"Whilst carrying on operations on the south to cut off the Ypres Salient, the Army commander [Sixt von Armin] still continued to make active preparations for the offensive which he intended to launch from Houthulst Forest. Ludendorff offered a fresh division (*13th*), so that eight divisions could be allotted for the task, four in the first line, three in second line and one in general reserve. The Army commander considered that an attack against Bixschoote, if carried out at the same time as the German efforts north of Bailleul, would lead, if not to a penetration of the British front, to a signal tactical success. General von Lossberg, Chief of

¹ The Intelligence map for the 17th of the whole German front showed (the figures for the 9th April are given in brackets): *Fourth Army*, 19 (15) divisions, 9 in two lines being opposite Ypres; *Sixth*, 24 (28); *Seventeenth*, 24 (15); *Second*, 30 (38); *Eighteenth*, 37 (32); *Seventh*, 11 (11); *First*, 9 (8); *Third*, 8 (8); *Fifth*, 11 (6); "C" Detachment, 8 (10); *Nineteenth*, 7 (4); "A" and "B" Detachments, 9 (10).

“ the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, was of opinion that the evacuation of the Ypres Salient by the British would in itself be a very fine result.

“ The *Guard Corps* would have for the attack the following artillery for the four divisions which were to be in the front line :

“ *6th Bavarian Division* : 21 light and 20 heavy batteries ;

“ *19th Reserve Division* : 21 light and 20 heavy batteries ;

“ *58th Division* : 20 light and 20 heavy batteries ;

“ *83rd Division* : 17 light and 20 heavy batteries.

“ In addition, the corps would be given a large number of trench mortars, two battalions of heavy artillery and two armoured car groups.

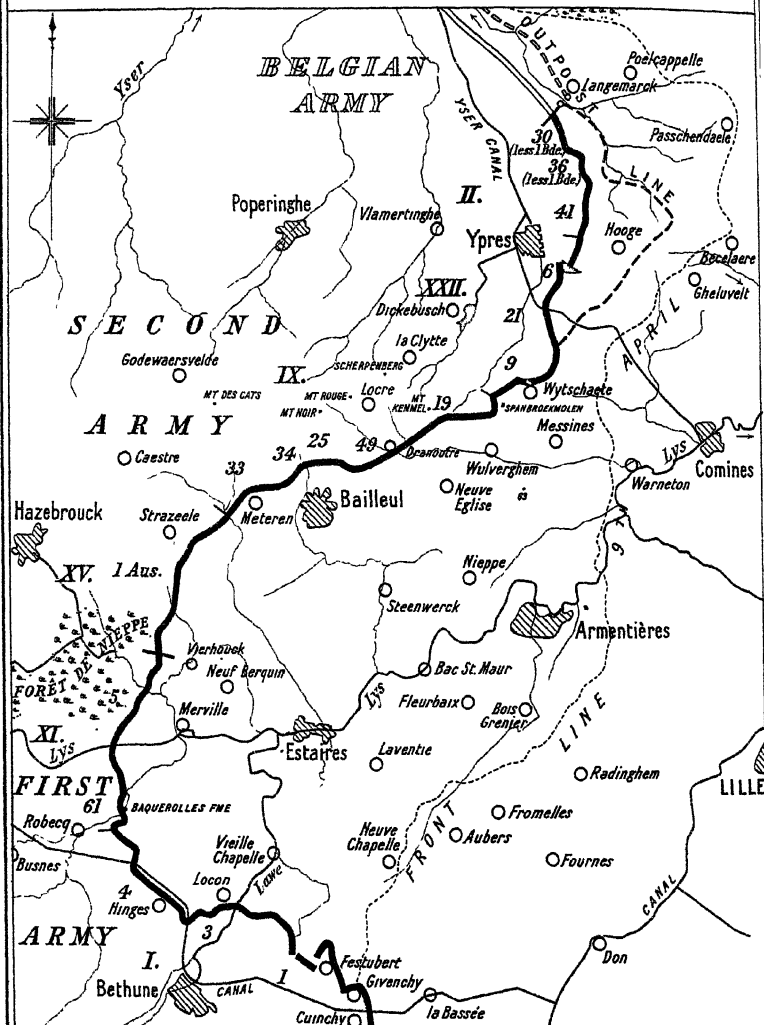
“ The Army commander had interviews with the commander of the *Guard Corps* and with some of the divisional generals. The consensus of opinion was, that the attack would not present any particular difficulty, nor would the passage of the Yser, but that the crucial matter would be the creation of a rapid line of communication across the shell-cratered zone.

“ The *6th Bavarian Division*, which had recently arrived from the *Seventeenth Army*, only had fifty men per company. It had originally been intended to launch the attack on the 17th ; but, owing to the necessity of carrying out certain reliefs and of forming ammunition dumps, it had been postponed, and the earliest date now given was the 19th April.” ¹

¹ This was said on the 15th ; later, the 20th was fixed. The account is taken from the *Fourth Army Diary*, pp. 121-2.

Sketch 25.

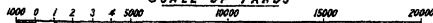
THE LYS, 17TH APRIL.



REFERENCE.

Army boundaries..... Corps boundaries.....
Line 17th April.....

SCALE OF YARDS



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

17TH APRIL 1918

THE FIRST BATTLE OF KEMMEL

(Maps 18, 23 ; Sketches 25, B)

THE 17th April, in spite of continued enemy attacks, was a day of completely successful resistance. In the case of a defensive battle, it is not enough to know that the enemy gained no ground in order to gauge the magnitude of the victory : his intentions which were frustrated and the effect of the defeat on his leaders must also be realized. Documents captured from his *Fourth Army* show that the *Sixth* and *Fourth Armies* were to make from the south and the east a powerful offensive (for which the code name was "Tannenberg") against the flanks of the Ypres Salient, reduce it and capture the commanding line of Flanders hills : Mont Noir—Mont Rouge—Mount Kemmel. What happened is well described in the words of two German regimental histories : "the attacking waves were cut down by furious machine-gun fire. It was discovered that the enemy had a continuous main line with an outpost line, consisting of short lengths of trench, in front of it, and the whole intervening ground was covered by unerring machine-gun flanking fire, which made progress impossible. The foremost waves were compelled to return to their jumping-off trenches, suffering severe losses." There the troops "lay the whole day under the heaviest fire, whilst British aeroplanes circled above them and shot them down. The bombs tore great gaps in the ranks."¹ The failure very nearly led to the breaking off of the Flanders offensive.²

¹ From "Regt. No. 96", p. 484, and "Regt. No. 163", p. 316.

² See Note at end of Chapter, and *Fourth Army* Diary for the 16th and 17th April.

Until 11 A.M. the day was clear, although without sun, but after that hour low clouds and mist settled down over Flanders. The Royal Air Force carried out 61 contact patrols and reconnaissances, and dropped $10\frac{1}{2}$ tons of bombs, not without effect on the enemy movements. In reply, his air activity was slight, and after 11 A.M., "practically nil".

Map 13. The palm of honour on this day must be awarded to the Belgians.¹ At dawn, the Germans opened a violent bombardment on the whole Belgian line, and this was followed at 8 A.M. by an assault from Houthulst Forest. It fell on the right of the line, the six-mile front held by the 10th and 3rd Divisions, between Langemarck (the Ypres—Langemarck—Staden railway was the boundary with the British Second Army) and the southern edge of Lake Blankaart. There was no inundation on this part of the front, to which the Belgians had withdrawn at the same time as the Second Army evacuated the forward part of the Ypres Salient.

By 1 P.M., in the right sector, between the railway and Draaibank, the enemy (*58th Division*) had captured some of the advanced posts; but before dark these had been recovered by counter-attacks covered by very effective artillery fire, to which the British II. Corps contributed. The shattered remains of the attackers withdrew, pursued by the fire of the Belgian machine guns. In the left sector between Draaibank and Lake Blankaart, the line was penetrated at Kippe (about a mile east of Merckem) near the lake, and the enemy (*1st Landwehr* with a regiment of the *2nd Naval Division*) began to roll up the Belgian line southwards, at the same time reinforcing his front of attack by putting in the *6th Bavarian Division*, which broke through. Two strongpoints north of Draaibank, however, still held out; reserves and survivors of the front line occupied the rising ground south and south-west of the village; and the fire of these troops on the Bavarians, who offered splendid targets, brought the attack to a stop about midday. Meanwhile, from 9.45 A.M. onwards, the Belgians launched counter-attacks immediately south of Lake Blankaart; after heavy fighting, Kippe was recaptured about the same time as the Bavarians were checked, and by evening the whole Belgian line had been re-established.

¹ The action is called by them "The Battle of Merckem". There is a good description of it in the *Bulletin Belge des Sciences Militaires* for January 1932.

No less than 20 officers, and 759 other ranks and 60 machine guns had been captured from the Germans.¹ The German attack from Houthulst Forest, under direction of the Staff of the *Guard Corps*, on which Crown Prince Rupprecht relied to get the offensive going again, had failed completely.²

The southern enemy attack extended on the west as far as the Hazebrouck—Bailleul railway, and on the east as far as Kemmel. It therefore included part of the XV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle), the front of the 1st Australian Brigade (with which there were on the extreme left some of the 5/Scottish Rifles who made it a point of honour to decline relief), and the front of the 98th Brigade (with which were two chasseur battalions of the French 133rd Divn, and the Lewis guns of the 5th Tank Battalion); and it fell on the whole front of the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. H. Gordon) of the Second Army.

Map 23.
Sketch
25.

Against certain parts of the line of the XV. Corps the assault was launched about 8.30 A.M., and at others, about 10 A.M., with a general renewal, after desultory fighting, about 6 P.M.

At 3 A.M. Strazeele was sharply shelled, and at 9 A.M. a fierce barrage of all calibres except the lightest suddenly fell on the area of the 1st Australian Brigade, missing the front line, but striking nearly everything behind it which was marked on the map: villages, farms, cross-roads, even some hedges. At 10 A.M. the 35th and 12th Divisions³ assaulted in extended lines, making short rushes, but were met with such a volume of fire from the 4th and 1st Australian Battalions on the left that they at once desisted. Opposite the 3rd Battalion the Germans hardly left their shallow jumping-off trenches. The assault was two or three times repeated in all sectors; but the batteries of the defence

¹ The Belgians lost :

	Officers	Other Ranks
10th Division	10	273
8rd Division	16	674

The 6th Bavarian Division alone lost "70 officers and over 2,000 men". B.O.A., p. 492.

² The first German reports claimed that the 58th Division had crossed the Steenebeek, but O.H.L. found out next day that not only had the division not crossed the stream, but was at some distance from it. It was also stated that some of the 6th Bavarian Division remained in the Belgian front line: these were five hundred prisoners!

³ The 12th Division had been in the March battle, but had been in rest at Douai from 29th March.

were ready and a hurricane of fire shattered every attempt. Shortly after midday the enemy artillery stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and the Australian front was quiet until 3.30 P.M., when shelling recommenced. At 5.30 P.M. the German infantry again attempted to leave its trenches, again with disastrous results, and until dark the Australian snipers continued to pick off parties seen moving about. So secure did the Australians feel that they did not report the attacks until the end of the day.

On the 98th Brigade front (Br.-General J. D. Heriot-Maitland), extending from the back of Meteren to behind Bailleul, with the 4/King's, 32nd and 116th Chasseurs à pied, 1/Middlesex, 2/Argyll and 5th Tank Battalion Lewis guns in the line, the German artillery bombardment also fell at 9 A.M. and was very heavy. Half an hour later Germans of the *81st Reserve* and *38th Divisions* were seen moving in column among hedges a thousand yards off, opposite the Argyll and the Tank Corps Lewis gunners. Fire compelled them to deploy and then lie down. Several times they made gallant efforts to rise and come on; but, after being shattered by fire at each attempt, they eventually desisted, and withdrew soon after 11 A.M. Further attacks were expected; but it was not until 6 P.M. that the enemy, after a short bombardment, advanced against the whole front of the 98th Brigade and its attached troops. He succeeded, by working up through the houses along the road, in capturing a farm in the front line on the Meteren—Flêtre road, in the sector held by the two French chasseur battalions; but he was immediately driven out by a counter-attack, in which portions of the 4/King's and 1/Middlesex took part.

In expectation of an attack in this sector, General Valentin, commanding the French 133rd Divn, the bulk of whose troops were around Caestre, had asked during the night of the 16th/17th that the 29th Division Provisional Brigade (formed of the survivors of the 86th and 87th Bes), then at St. Sylvestre Cappel (6 miles W.N.W. of Meteren), might be moved up three miles to Rouge Croix to support the right of his battalions. Lieut.-General de Lisle agreed to one battalion being sent forward by 5.30 A.M., and at 10.15 A.M. the two others were ordered to Le Peuplier (1½ miles W.N.W. of Rouge Croix); but at noon the 3rd Australian Brigade, relieved in the Hazebrouck defences by the 31st Dn, was sent to the Rouge Croix area, to be ready to counter-attack if any part of the XV. Corps line were

broken. The 29th Division Provisional Brigade was then sent back to St. Sylvestre Cappel.

In the sector of the IX. Corps, in the left centre of the line, the troops under Major-General Nicholson (34th Dn),¹ dug in on the forward slopes of Mont Noir and Mont Rouge, had now the support of the horse artillery of the French 6th and 2nd Cavalry Divisions, as well as the guns of the 38th Divn. During the night, they received many bursts of gun fire and at 6.25 A.M. a serious bombardment fell on the 103rd Be and the 100th brigade-battalion, which extended later to the 74th Be; fire crept backwards and forwards, but was mostly directed against the front and support trenches. It was learnt from prisoners that a general attack had been ordered, with 8.10 A.M. as zero hour, and as it got light Germans were seen assembling behind the light railway which connected Bailleul and Wulverghem. But, except against the forward posts of the 100th brigade-battalion, some of which, in a wood, were rushed after close fighting, no attempt to advance was observed until 8.30 A.M. and then only against the 103rd Be. This movement was at once stopped by artillery fire, with the result that the enemy bombardment was shortly resumed. At 10.30 A.M. another advance was made, this time against the 74th Be. Although a wood ran through the centre of the brigade's position and a large number of Germans were seen in a farm at its southern end, the enemy attempt was repulsed. A third effort made soon after, and at dusk a fourth, met a like fate.

Meantime the Germans in the wood they had won from the forward posts of the 100th brigade-battalion front clung to their footing; about 1 P.M. the hundred men remaining of the 6th/7th R. Scots Fusiliers were used to counter-attack, but failed to eject them. Another counter-attack at 6.30 P.M., after fifteen minutes' bombardment, by three companies of the 1/5th York & Lancaster (148th Be) was equally unsuccessful, owing to German artillery and trench-mortar fire, so the enemy had to be left in possession. The 148th Be, which had lost one officer and 74 men out of three officers and 200 men in its efforts, relieved the 100th brigade-battalion during the night. The 89th Bde (30th

¹ 147th Bde, 101st, 74th, 103rd Bes, with the 100th brigade-battalion and Wyatt's Force, under the 49th Divn (Major-General N. J. G. Cameron) on their left; the 88th, 148th and 71st Bes were in second line, and the 7th Composite Bde (7th and 75th Bes) in reserve.

Divn of the II. Corps) having been placed at Major-General Nicholson's disposal, was used by him to relieve the 74th, 101st and 103rd Bes, which he drew into support and reserve, the latter two being amalgamated to form a composite brigade. Men of the 13th Tank Battalion, who arrived with 48 Lewis guns, were sent to the front line.

The sector of the line held by the 19th Dn, covering Kemmel, was over three miles long: it was manned by a thin line of the 178th Bde (Br.-General T. W. Stansfeld, 59th Divn), and by the 56th, 57th and 58th Bes of the 19th Dn, "co-ordinated" by Br.-General T. A. Cubitt (57th Be), with Colonel Bousfield's Kemmel Defence Force behind them. During the night a 700-yard gap had been discovered on the right, between Wyatt's Force and the 2/6th Sherwood Foresters of the 178th Bde; it was blocked by sending an officer and 30 sappers of the 456th Field Company R.E. from the Kemmel Defence Force to hold Donegal Farm, which lay in its centre. Later they were reinforced by the 71st Be, which moved up a company of the 1/Leicestershire.

Although there is an outlying knoll half a mile to the south-west of the main summit, Mount Kemmel presented from the enemy's side the appearance of a squat pyramid rising from a plain, and offered a splendid target. From 6 A.M. a heavy bombardment of guns of large calibre was concentrated by the enemy on both the summit and lower slopes; but it fell clear of the front position. The latter consisted of a continuous trench and wire, with a non-continuous series of support trenches; behind these were a number of machine-gun posts (some of them of reinforced concrete), small strongpoints, and observing posts, all with good dug-outs. At 8.30 A.M. German infantry was seen advancing in extended order less than a thousand yards away, over the crest of the low Lindenhoeck ridge. Fire was opened, men were seen to fall, others ran away, but presently the advance was resumed by men trickling forward one by one. About 10 A.M. the bombardment, owing no doubt to the front line having been located, began to descend on the front and support trenches, and particularly on Donegal Farm. Fifty minutes later a general attack was launched against the 178th Bde and 56th and 57th Bes. This was met by the combined fire of artillery (19th Dn artillery and 162nd Brigade R.F.A. of the 33rd Division), Lewis guns and rifles, augmented by overhead machine-gun fire from the slopes of Mount Kemmel. The enemy was thus held up at a distance of four or five hundred yards except at two places:

on the right, where, only the officer and eight sappers having survived the bombardment, Donegal Farm was captured ; and in the centre of the 178th Bde, where the enemy reached some Nissen huts (Aircraft Farm) quite close to the front line.

By 12.30 P.M. the fighting had quieted down all along the front, though near the junction of the 178th Bde and 56th Be, at Lindenhoeck, the Germans recommenced trickling forward. A few of them managed to reach the trenches of the 56th Be, only to be bombed out with a loss of 25 killed. The 2/5th Sherwood Foresters, the reserve battalion of the 178th Bde, and another company of the 1/Leicestershire were sent up to fill the gap near Donegal Farm, and by 3 P.M. the line was again continuous, although still very weakly held. About this time the officer commanding the French 99th Regiment (28th Division) visited Colonel Bousfield, and agreed to send up two battalions to reinforce the most thinly held portion of the line of the 178th Bde around Donegal and Aircraft Farms. By 4 P.M. these troops had arrived and relieved the 2/5th Sherwood Foresters, while the third battalion halted behind Mount Kemmel in reserve. The French 22nd Regiment (28th Division) also moved up, and placed one battalion to hold the Scherpenberg (a prominent summit, 2 miles north-west of Kemmel) and the village of La Clytte (about 2 miles W.N.W. of Kemmel) ; a second near Kemmel ; and the third just east of the hill.

At 6 P.M., as elsewhere, after a short bombardment, another attack developed, here on the left mainly against the 57th and 58th Bes, but it was easily repulsed. A counter-attack, however, intended to regain Spanbroekmolen for which the 28th Division provided troops, failed owing to a hurricane of machine-gun fire, so that the French did not succeed in advancing more than two hundred yards from the 19th Dn line.

This ended the enemy's attempts to capture Mount Kemmel on this day. At night troops of the French 28th Division twice raided Donegal Farm, and at the second attempt killed or took prisoner the garrison, thus regaining possession. Later, patrols found that the Germans were holding a well-defined line, some half a mile away, opposite the front of attack. Major-General Jeffreys (19th Dn) therefore ordered the 108th Be to furnish a battalion of four hundred men to join the reserve battalion of the 178th Bde on the western slopes of Mount Kemmel, and by 4 A.M. this had been done. The 108th brigade-battalion was then

moved to the northern slopes, where unfortunately it lost heavily from gun fire. The divisional field artillery and the heavy artillery of the IX. Corps (Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie) also suffered considerable losses of personnel from shell and gas on this day; the infantrymen, though "sticking it out", were suffering so severely that it was not thought advisable to discourage them by the sight of batteries moving back, so the foremost guns were kept in position, though they could have done their work equally well farther back.

To the north, the XXII. Corps, covering Ypres, had a comparatively quiet day. In view of the lack of troops, Lieut.-General Godley decided not to make a further counter-attack to recover Wytschaete until the French 28th Division had settled down and was fully prepared to co-operate. At 10.40 A.M. and 7.10 P.M. the enemy, who endeavoured all day to locate the new line of resistance, was seen massing near Polygon and Pheasant Woods, but in each case was dispersed by artillery fire. During the night of the 17th/18th, by arrangement, the Belgians took over the front of the 30th Divn, the left of the Second Army, thus freeing it to go into reserve.

During the early morning of the 17th, Sir H. Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had an interview with General Foch at Blendecques (Second Army headquarters), and "proposed that the Allied Armies in Flanders should be withdrawn progressively to the line of inundation, Aire—St. Omer—Furnes".¹ General Foch refused to adopt such a measure. Later in the day, General Wilson put his views on paper in a note addressed to General Foch. He said that two courses were open to the Allies if the enemy challenged them in battle along the present line near Ypres:

"(a) We can accept battle on our line of to-day;

"(b) we can shorten our line by withdrawing altogether from where we now stand and gradually reach and hold a line with our left on the inundation of Aire—St. Omer—the sea."

Since General Foch preferred the former of these courses,

¹ Foch ii., p. 63. This does not appear in the extract of Wilson's diary for the day given in Wilson ii., p. 92; but in the account of the conference at Abbeville on the previous day he records (p. 91) that he told Foch "he must inundate to the full at once".

General Wilson urged him to bring up sufficient divisions to defeat all the enemy attacks: how many would be required must depend upon the number thrown in by the Germans: if this were his policy he should inform Sir Douglas Haig of it, so that the latter might have no doubt as to his wishes, which he would then carry out. In conclusion, General Wilson pointed out that both he and the Commander-in-Chief agreed with General Plumer in thinking that the British Second Army would be unable to hold its present line much longer with the troops then at General Plumer's disposal, if the Germans continued to attack as they had been doing.

The views of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff were communicated by G.H.Q. to General Plumer in a personal and secret memorandum. It contained the following "conclusions": if the enemy continued his pressure against the Second Army and no adequate reinforcements were sent, the left of the Army might be compelled to swing back gradually on to successive positions until eventually the line rested on the defences north-east of the Aire—St. Omer canal: it was highly undesirable that ground should be given up or such a movement take place, but the safety of the Second Army might require it: no withdrawal of a considerable nature was to be made without the sanction of the Commander-in-Chief: even if authorized, a retirement must be very deliberate so as to give time to withdraw troops and material and to complete the rear defences and inundations: General Plumer was requested to have the successive positions reconnoitred and prepared, and to submit his plans to G.H.Q.

After his conversation with Sir H. Wilson, General Foch proceeded to visit General Gillain, Chief of the Staff of the Belgian Army, at Houthem; and at 2 p.m., with the President of the Republic, he had an audience of King Albert, when he indicated his conception of the defensive rôle of the Belgian Army,¹ which was "to organize and "maintain resistance on the line then held".² He then went on to Dunkirk to renew his instructions to General Putz, "Commandant Supérieur du Nord", as regards making inundations and "organizing machine-gun posts "to sweep the obligatory points of passage".³ At 7.25 p.m. he telephoned to his staff to order the 154th Division to the north by march, and another division (39th) by rail.

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 461.

² Foch ii., p. 63.

³ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 461.

Thus, as the 34th Division arrived that evening by lorry at Steenvoorde (10 miles west of Kemmel), three more divisions were put on their way to General Plumer's assistance,¹ and it was decided by General Pétain to organize the French forces in Flanders—the 28th, 34th, 39th, 133rd and 154th Divisions and II. Cavalry Corps—as the D.A.N. (Détachement d'Armée du Nord), under General de Mitry, the "Commandement Supérieur du Nord" under General Putz being abolished. Before leaving Blendecques early next morning, General Foch handed to Generals Plumer and Robillot, the following Directive :

"The important things are :

Map 13.
Sketch
B.

- "1. To assure at all costs the occupation of the 'massif' Kemmel—Mont Noir—Mont des Cats, not forgetting to watch the direction Dickebusch—Ypres.
- "2. To extend the ground already occupied by capturing the lower slopes of the 'massif', and, if it be possible, the higher ground on which the enemy is established, such as Neuve Eglise, Wytschaete and Bailleul.
- "3. With this object in view, the proper course is to proceed to attacks each aimed at an objective relatively close, which should then be organized as a base for a fresh attack on a fresh objective. For this purpose : concentration of artillery fire, relatively little infantry.
- "4. These offensive actions should be begun without delay, in order to profit from the activity of our troops and not to allow the enemy time to organize.
- "5. On principle, always keep in reserve one French division and one French cavalry division.
- "6. All British troops withdrawn from the battle should be reorganized close behind it, so as to be available to support or relieve the troops in front in case of need."

General Foch then left Flanders, to which he did not return for ten days ; but on the 19th he summed up his views as to the tactics to be employed in a Note, which, being only of academic interest, is given in an appendix ;² whilst in another Note addressed to Sir Douglas Haig he pointed out, somewhat unnecessarily, the need of retaining Mount Kemmel at all costs, as it was a position of capital importance for the defence of the Ypres sector and

¹ The 154th Division began to arrive during the evening of the 18th just north-west of Poperinghe, and the 39th in an area 8 miles north-west of the same town. General Maistre's (Tenth Army) other two original divisions remained east of Doullens, and the 31st and 32nd Divisions from Amiens arrived on the evening of the 17th ten miles south of that town.

² Appendix 16.

those to the south : should the hill be captured, it would be necessary to establish a new line west of Ypres on the massif of Mont Noir—Mont Rouge and thence to Poperinghe : this line would join on to that prepared by the Belgians along the Loo canal. General Foch concluded by asking that General Plumer should be instructed to begin at once to improve the works already in existence on the above line, adding that he was writing to General Gillain in the same sense.

All this work and much else had already been taken in hand : rear defences ; a great road across the marshes north of St. Omer, where for five miles there was no passage ; additional bridges ; diversions on the railways in case existing railway bridges were damaged ; three great pumping engines at Dunkirk to throw sea water into the inundations if required, at all states of the tide ; schemes for the supply of the Armies in the north in various contingencies, should Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne fall into the hands of the enemy, and should the railways be cut at different places ; schemes for the removal of machinery, ammunition, petrol and stores of all kinds, since on the 19th April there were 84,650 tons of ammunition in the Second Army depôts.¹

Sir Douglas Haig also spent the later part of the day in visits to the Flanders front. At 1 P.M. he saw General Plumer and discussed with him the successive lines to be occupied if the Second Army were forced to fall back. He then motored on to Steenvoorde, the headquarters of the XXII. Corps, and learnt from General Godley of the failure of the French 28th Division to co-operate on the previous evening, which had the result that Wytschaete had not been regained. Going on to Godewaersvelde, IX. Corps headquarters, he saw Lieut.-General Gordon, his chief General Staff officer (Br.-General W. J. Maxwell-Scott) and all his staff, who had undergone a particularly hard trial. Naturally, Lieut.-General Gordon was forced to tell him that all his troops were tired, some battalions, according to their commanding officers, so tired that they could not fire their rifles : still, the day was going well, and he had ordered the reserves to attack if necessary in order to retain the present line.

Sir Douglas Haig's problems were not confined to the Flanders front. The difficulty of providing for the mass

¹ 56,000 tons in the First Army depôts ; 28,700 in the Third Army ; 48,000 in the Fourth ; and 361,000 in the L. of C. depôts.

been called upon to fight again : but there were no troops available to replace them in the line : taking these facts into consideration, it was his opinion that, "speaking generally, it is not possible to maintain a really effective defence "with the forces now available" : according to the latest Intelligence reports, fresh German divisions had been brought against him, indicating the probability of a continuance of the attack, and in such a case he foresaw that the resistance of his Army must certainly be worn down : in order to make an effective defence against the German forces now opposed to him, he required six fresh divisions, and more would be needed if the enemy increased his strength. He ended by expressing confidence in the tenacity of his troops, who "had fought well and have held on to their "position, and will, I am confident, continue to do so".

Sir Douglas Haig forwarded a copy of this report to General Foch, with a covering letter emphasizing that nearly all the divisions had previously been engaged in the March battle, and were thus twice worn out within one month : that the losses of regimental officers and experienced n.-c.o.'s had been very heavy ; and that three more French divisions, in addition to the five already detailed, should be sent to General Plumer's Army.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 17TH APRIL

Map 23. As a result of the British-Belgian withdrawal from the Ypres Salient, O.H.L. determined to deliver on the 17th the attack from Houthulst Forest, intended for the 20th April. Eight divisions should have taken part, but, now, of the four divisions in line, two—the 58th and 236th—were already following up the Belgians and British, and of the four divisions earmarked as reserves, two (the 233rd and 13th Reserve) had not completed detrainment. Two divisions (the 6th Bavarian, with the 5th Naval Regiment, and the 1st Landwehr) were therefore to attack on the right of the 58th Division, supported by the 19th and 83rd Divisions, at first disposed near Staden. The assault was to be delivered at 8 A.M., after half an hour's bombardment, and the object of the attack was to separate the Belgians from the British.

The left wing of the *Fourth Army* (left of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, *X. Reserve* and *Guard Reserve Corps*), in conjunction with the *Sixth Army*, was also to launch a strong attack at 10 A.M. : the *Fourth Army* on the front Wulverghem—Bailleul, with the object of capturing Kemmel, Mont Rouge, and Mont Noir ;¹ the *Sixth Army*

¹ Although not explicitly stated, it is clear that the *Fourth Army* was to attack strongly with its left, with the object of capturing Mont Noir and Mont Rouge, and thus outflanking the Kemmel heights. O.H.L. had always considered a frontal attack against Kemmel as too hazardous.

between the Becque de la Flanche (west of Bailleul) and Strazeele, in the direction of Godewaersvelde.

The left division of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps (Fourth Army)* was to move against Mount Kemmel from the east ; but, generally speaking, this corps, whose divisions had suffered heavily, would remain on the defensive and not advance unless events on its left took a favourable turn. Thus, on the 17th April the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* were to launch powerful offensives from east and south against the Ypres Salient. O.H.L. made preparations to exploit any success, and let it be known that five fresh divisions would detrain in rear of the inner flanks of the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies*.

The complete failure of the attack against the Belgians has been related in the text. But early reports of success encouraged the headquarters of the *Guard Corps* to make plans for reinforcing the *58th Division* with the *83rd* on the 18th and attempting to break through in the direction of Pilkem—Boesinghe ; this plan had to be abandoned, as the *6th Bavarian Division* reported that its troops were no longer in a fit state to attack and in their retreat had carried away the right of the *1st Landwehr Division*.

South of the Ypres Salient, the results of the day were equally disappointing. The combined offensive of the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies* to capture the line Mount Kemmel—Mont Rouge—Mont Noir failed badly. The commanders of the *X. Reserve, Guard Reserve* and *III. Bavarian Corps* declared that it was impossible to continue the offensive unless the exhausted troops in the front line were relieved. The *X. Reserve Corps* intended to put in its two reserve divisions during the night, and hoped then to be able to continue the attack on the 18th ; it asked for one division as corps reserve. The *XVIII. Reserve Corps* reported that it had no reserves left, and asked for one division at least to replace the *17th Reserve Division*, which was quite played out.

In a discussion which took place by telephone between 7.30 P.M. and midnight, General von Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, pointed out to General von Kuhl, Crown Prince Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff, that the situation was very critical : all idea of capturing Kemmel and Mont Noir by an attack on a broad front must be given up unless fresh infantry could be provided : seven divisions of the *Fourth Army* were exhausted and urgently required relief, and a minimum of five new divisions was needed : tactically, the position of the *Fourth Army* was unsound, clinging precariously as it did to the foot of the slopes held by the Allies. Finally, he declared that if the *Guard Corps* had no success on the 18th, its attack must be broken off. Kuhl replied that it would be impossible to give the *Fourth Army* any fresh divisions to fight in the Bailleul area before the 21st April, because the *Sixth Army* was also clamouring for reinforcements. He therefore suggested the concentration of all resources against the Belgians, whilst the *3rd Guard Division*, which was fresh, attacked Wytschaete. This, Lossberg said, was impossible as this division was required to relieve the *17th Reserve* ; and Kuhl did not insist. The latter seemed dubious, in any case, about the results likely to be attained by the German offensive, and gave instructions for a good line of defence to be chosen for occupation if the *Guard Corps* failed on the 18th April.

Ludendorff was informed of the situation, and postponed making his decision until he saw how the *Guard Corps* fared on the 18th :

if all went well, he would send two extra divisions to the *Fourth Army* to exploit the success : if not, the three divisions in reserve behind the *Guard Corps*, but not yet engaged (*13th, 19th Reserve* and *233rd*) must be rapidly withdrawn : he intended, however, to leave these divisions with the *Fourth Army* for its attacks on other parts of the front.

The following is an extract from Crown Prince Rupprecht's diary for the 17th :

" I think there will be strong attacks made from between Béthune and St. Venant against the left flank of our attacking forces. . . .
" Until evening, the *Fourth Army* kept reporting that the English had hurriedly evacuated their forward positions in the Ypres Salient as a result of the capture of Wytschaete. The Belgians must have offered strong resistance. It is reported that our troops have crossed the Steenebeek. The enemy appears to be weak between the Ypres—Gheluvelt road and the Hollebeke canal. The attack is now in progress and will be continued to-morrow. Artillery has been brought forward. None of the divisions in the second line has yet been engaged.

" As regards the left flank of the *Fourth Army*, news is less favourable ; only very slight gains have been made in the direction of Kemmel. Everywhere else the attack has come to a standstill. The enemy has apparently been reinforced ; but our troops are very tired.

" The headquarters of both Armies report that the attack cannot be continued."

CHAPTER XIX

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

18TH APRIL 1918

THE BATTLE OF BÉTHUNE THE FIRST BATTLE OF KEMMEL (*concluded*)

(Maps 18, 23, 24 ; Sketch 25)

THE 18th April was another day of successful defence. The German plans, which were based on the ultimate seizure of the entire Ypres area, included the capture of Givenchy, Festubert and Béthune, as well as that of Mount Kemmel, and the driving back of the Belgians. They were completely foiled.¹ The weather was dull and cold, with mist, thick near the canals, and occasional rainstorms until the afternoon, when it improved somewhat ; low clouds prevented more than 16 air reconnaissances and contact patrols being carried out, but 2½ tons of bombs were dropped, and some assistance from the air was given in repelling the German attack near Pacaut Wood. Enemy air activity was again "practically nil", although a few low-flying planes took part in the fighting.

At 10.50 P.M. on the 17th, the Intelligence Branch of the First Army General Staff had warned the I. and XI. Corps ^{Map 24.} ^{Sketch 25.}

¹ See Note at end of Chapter, which might be read at this point.

² I. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Holland) : 11th Division (south of the canal), 1st Division (part of which had relieved the 55th Divn during the nights of the 15th/16th and 16th/17th—it left the 2nd Brigade south of the canal), 3rd and 4th Divns, with the 55th Divn and 46th Division in reserve. The last-named had been in the line near Lens, but had been relieved between the 11th and 18th by the 3rd Canadian Division of the Canadian Corps, which extended its front northwards for the purpose. The whole Canadian Corps was thus concentrated, and had not so far been in the battle, as Lieut.-General Currie had protested successfully to General Horne against any divisions being taken from him.

The XI. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking) contained the same divisions as on the 17th : 61st Divn and 5th Division in front line ; 51st and 50th Dns in reserve.

that indications, confirmed by prisoners' statements, pointed to the probability of an attack, which had been delayed for a day or two owing to the explosion of so many German artillery dumps, being launched against them on the following morning between the La Bassée and Lys canals, that is between Givenchy (inclusive) and Nieppe Forest (exclusive). There had been heavy shelling though only slight infantry action on the 17th; but preparations for a formal attack had been obvious for some days, so that the troops were on the alert.

Map 24.
Sketch
25.

At 1 A.M. on the 18th, a heavy bombardment from guns of all calibres fell on the sector from Givenchy to Robecq, held by the 1st Division and 3rd and 4th Divns. This bombardment lasted seven hours on the front of the 1st Division, but only four hours on that held by the other two. It was of the same nature as that employed by the Germans on the 21st March, opening on the battery positions mainly with gas shell, while a storm of high-explosive burst upon back areas, important localities and cross roads, Béthune, in particular, receiving attention. Fortunately, many of the shells used for the last purpose were 16-inch naval shrapnel, bursting 2,000 or 3,000 feet above the ground and not particularly harmful. The batteries incurred heavy casualties: for instance the 275th Brigade R.F.A. (of the 55th Divn artillery, still in the line), lost 11 out of 24 guns. The bombardment, after about three hours, was intensified and increased in depth to include the front and support lines, many of the brick-stacks which had hitherto provided good cover being entirely demolished; whilst about 7 A.M. it was extended south of the La Bassée canal to the sector held by the 2nd Brigade (Br.-General G. C. Kelly).

At 8.10 A.M., when the mist had so far cleared that visibility improved to between 150 and 200 yards, six German divisions, under a deep creeping barrage, launched an infantry attack against the front Givenchy—Robecq. Three divisions advanced on the 1st and 3rd Brigades (Br.-Generals W. B. Thornton and H. H. S. Morant) of the 1st Division (Major-General E. P. Strickland), which were holding the former front of the 55th Divn, supported by the 55th Divn artillery (Br.-General A. M. Perreau), augmented in the course of the morning by the batteries of the 1st Division south of the canal.¹ A desperate combat took

¹ The 1/L.N. Lancashire, 1/Black Watch, 1/Gloucestershire and 1/S.

place on the ground where, in December 1914, the 1/Manchester, under the present divisional commander, then Lieut.-Colonel Strickland, had held Givenchy.¹

So close did the Germans keep to the barrage that they rushed the front trenches at the salient around Givenchy, held by the 1/Black Watch, from a distance of no more than about forty yards, just as the barrage began to creep forward.² Profiting by their previous experience, they had no doubt marked down and now gassed the exits of the tunnel systems in Givenchy, in which the local reserves to the front line were sheltering; perhaps also the men of the 1st Division, having taken over the sector less than 36 hours earlier—some battalions and the machine guns had taken over only at 10 P.M. on the previous night—were not so practised as those of the 55th Divn in making a rapid exit from the dug-outs. In any case, the two right companies of the Black Watch were overrun and their reserves were caught before they could emerge from their shelters.

The left of the Black Watch line stood fast, and Givenchy Keep held out stoutly, although its garrison was reduced from two officers and 40 other ranks to one officer (of the 1/L.N. Lancashire, who had come from Marie Redoubt, the latter being connected to Givenchy Keep by tunnel, to take command), and eight other ranks. The troops in other redoubts suffered equally severely; but in every case the defenders, in spite of enemy fire from automatic rifles used from shell holes to cover rushes, and in spite of aeroplane fire, maintained their positions, wave after wave of the attack breaking in vain against them. The enemy also presented splendid targets to the 2/R. Sussex on the south bank of the canal, whence four guns of the 1st Machine-Gun Battalion fired over 30,000 rounds at lines of Germans crossing

Wales Borderers were in the front position, with the 1/Cameron Highlanders, 2/Welch and one company 6/Welch (Pioneers) in reserve.

Of the 6 German divisions, the 4 on the south had been in action since 9th April; the 240th and 239th, on their right, had come into the battle on the 15th and 14th respectively. The latter had been engaged in the March battle, but had had eleven days' rest. Prisoners of all 6 divisions were captured, and some of them carried maps which gave B  thune as the objective.

¹ "1915" Vol. I., pp. 20-1.

² "Regt. No. 202" (of the 43rd Reserve Division), p. 138, however, puts another complexion on this: "The German artillery had 80 batteries in action. Unfortunately, the heavy guns shot too short, and often into their own line . . . many undamaged machine-gun nests held up the attack", and the moving up of reserves was made impossible by machine-gun fire which mowed them down. At 11.30 A.M. the regiment again suffered from its own artillery fire.

their front at about 800 yards. By 11 A.M. the enemy progress had been definitely stopped in the Givenchy sector, with the loss of only part of the village and of a few trenches and craters to the north; the front was littered with enemy dead, rifles and equipment. A few Germans filtered southwards from Givenchy into the trenches of the 1/L.N. Lancashire, and in places reached the main line of resistance; but they were quickly ejected by a vigorous counter-attack of two companies, and retained only a few isolated posts in the outpost line. An attempt made in the evening to regain all that had been lost by the 1st Brigade was not successful.

In the 3rd Brigade area, the enemy, somewhat similarly, at the first rush, managed to make entry at one place in Le Plantin, at the southern end of Festubert, and, on the other flank of the village, to capture the much disputed Route A Keep—the garrison having lost 50 out of 70 men. Elsewhere in the area, although the defensive line was not continuous and ended at N. Cailloux Keep with a large gap between it and Route A Keep, the enemy was driven back with heavy loss by the 1/Gloucestershire and 1/S. Wales Borderers. Parties of the enemy from the captured Route A Keep, supported by others who had got through gaps, however, worked down behind Festubert, practically cutting off the Gloucestershire, who again, as in Egypt in 1801, had to face and fight both to front and to rear. The last reserve of twenty men, signallers, cooks, orderlies and batmen, pushed through the gardens on the western side of the village, and eventually checked and drove back the invaders who had penetrated round the left flank. On the right flank, about Le Plantin, the situation was for a long time doubtful, the Germans having ensconced themselves among cottages and orchards, making it difficult for runners to get through to summon assistance.

With the help, however, of one company of the 1/Cameron Highlanders, the reserve battalion of the 1st Brigade, and part of the 2/Welch, the divisional reserve, the troops on the spot succeeded in forcing a passage to Le Plantin through the southern part of Festubert, accounting for many Germans on the way.¹ Here, by midday, even earlier on the left, the enemy began to realize that his attack had

¹ Two companies of the 2nd Brigade reserve were brought north of the canal to replace the 1st Brigade reserve, and a battalion of the 46th Division, placed by the First Army at the disposal of the I. Corps, was allotted to the 1st Division.

failed; the foremost troops tried to crawl back to safety and were shot in large numbers. By 5 P.M. the action of the 1st Division was at an end. Route A Keep and another post near it remained in German hands, but behind the gap thus created in the defence ran Tuning Fork Switch, with Tuning Fork Line as further security behind that.

The bombardment of the 3rd Divn (Major-General C. J. Deverell) and the 4th Divn (Major-General T. G. Matheson) began similarly to that of the 1st Division, and at 3.5 A.M. orders were sent to the 11th Bde (Br.-General T. S. H. Wade) in reserve of the 4th Divn, to move forward its battalions. Later, at 5 A.M., the 8th Bde (Br.-General B. D. Fisher), in reserve of the 3rd Divn, was likewise brought up from Béthune. Between 3 and 4 A.M. the divisional artilleries had put down a barrage on the front, while the heavy artillery fired on back areas; subsequently, until the mist cleared, the field batteries fired bursts of five minutes' fire every fifteen minutes.¹ Then at 5 A.M. the Germans (*18th Reserve Division*) opposite the 3rd Divn began to move, but they ended by making only ineffective efforts to advance.² In the 4th Divn area,³ owing to the bombardment, most of the parties of the 10th Bde working on the advanced posts north of the canal were withdrawn before the infantry attack, but the garrisons of the posts remained out. Soon after 4 A.M., the two posts of the 2/Seaforth Highlanders immediately west of Pacaut Wood were overrun, and only a few survivors managed to escape. The Germans (*240th Division* on the 10th Bde front) attempted to reach the neighbouring bridge, but failed to do so; then, being constantly reinforced from the wood, they tried to launch pontoons and light foot-bridges supported on bladders; but the working parties were shot down from the southern

¹ The 50th Dn artillery had been relieved and the 4th Divn was now supported by one of its own field artillery brigades, the XXXII., which had arrived on the 17th, and the 158th Army Brigade R.F.A., under its own C.R.A., Br.-General C. A. Sykes. The XXIX., the second field brigade of the 4th Divn, rejoined on the 25th.

² The *18th Reserve Division* was withdrawn next day. Its record in the British Intelligence files is: "did not distinguish itself in the Lys offensive, "and it was reported that it was only fit to be used as a holding division. "It was engaged in no other German offensive, and, indeed, no heavy "fighting until October, when the whole front was active on account of "the Allied advance to victory."

³ The 10th Bde (Br.-General J. Greene) had all its battalions, 1/R. Warwickshire, 2/Duke of Wellington's and 2/Seaforth Highlanders, and part of the 9th and 406th Field Companies R.E., in the front position, with outposts on the north bank of the canal; the 12th (Br.-General E. A. Fagan) had the 1/King's Own and 2/Lancashire Fusiliers in the front position, on the north bank, and the 2/Essex in reserve.

bank. About 5 A.M. the bombardment ceased, and by 6.15 A.M. the attackers had been completely thwarted. Subsequently, 115 Germans, who had taken shelter along the northern bank, surrendered, some swimming the canal, others being ferried over. No further effort worthy of mention was made by the enemy opposite the 10th Bde, and its reserves were not called on to intervene.

Next on the left, the 12th Bde beyond the canal became involved in a hard fight. The overrunning of the Seaforth post near Pacaut Wood exposed the right of the 1/King's Own, and the enemy (*239th Division* on this brigade front) overwhelmed the right company and then forced back the centre company to the south-western outskirts of Riez du Vinage. On the remainder of the brigade line, however, thanks largely to the excellent barrage put down by the divisional artillery, which caught the enemy as he started to move, the attempt of his infantry to advance at 5 A.M. and onwards was completely frustrated by the left of the 1/King's Own and the 2/Lancashire Fusiliers. During the rest of the day there was nothing but sniping. At 8.15 P.M., two officers and a hundred men of the 1/King's Own made an assault on Riez du Vinage, regaining part of the village together with most of the original line near it, and taking nineteen prisoners and a machine gun. It was learnt from captured orders that the true object of the German move had been the seizure of Hinges and Mont Bernenchon.

On the XI. Corps front, where the 61st Divn and 5th Division faced four German divisions, little happened except an attempt by the enemy to secure a passage over the Clarence near Baquerolles Farm in the 184th Bde sector, a troubled corner, as the farm had changed hands several times and there was incessant sniping. Here also heavy shelling was begun at 1 A.M., followed shortly after by the seizure of a farm near Baquerolles, from which a platoon of the 2/5th Gloucestershire at once ejected the assailants, capturing seventeen prisoners and a machine gun.¹ A formal enemy attack made about 6 A.M. was brought to a stand-still by rifle and machine-gun fire in spite of the mist. By midday the situation was normal; but at 8.15 P.M. heavy shelling began once more, whereupon the British artillery replied. This seems to have discouraged the Germans, for no infantry attack followed, and by midnight all was again quiet. In

¹ Shortly after this the commander of the battalion, Lieut.-Colonel A. B. Lawson, was killed whilst reconnoitring.

the sector of the 5th Division, nothing of importance occurred, and this was also the case on the front of the XV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle), held by the 1st Australian Division, with the 29th Divn (less 88th Be) and 31st Dn in reserve.

In the sector of the IX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. H. Map 23. Gordon) the enemy *31st Division* was to have made a surprise attack on Kemmel at 4.30 A.M.,¹ but "this coup de main could not be executed, our [German] infantry being overtaken by a violent fire of high explosive and gas shells as it was moving up to its jumping-off positions, which it could not therefore reach in time".² There is no corresponding account in the British records, although diaries mention that there was heavy enemy shelling near Kemmel about 4.15 A.M., which, about 4.30 A.M., became a formal bombardment of the higher forward and reverse slopes of the hill; so it would seem as though the intending attackers may have been stopped by their own artillery.³

After two hours the bombardment was shifted on to the summit and all the forward slope of Mount Kemmel; then about 8 A.M. Germans, in parties of fifty to a hundred, were seen trying to advance against Donegal Farm, due south of Kemmel, in the 178th Bde front, held by the 2/6th Sherwood Foresters. Three hours later the detachment of the French 99th Regiment on the west of the farm reported to Br.-General Stansfeld that the line had been penetrated:⁴ but when two companies of the 2/5th Sherwood Foresters, from the reserve, were sent to counter-attack, the report was found to be incorrect. A little later the French insisted that Aircraft Farm, held by the 2/6th Sherwood Foresters, was in enemy possession, and arranged for its bombardment by their artillery. The British garrison was therefore withdrawn, but no bombardment took place, and the farm was reoccupied at 4 P.M.⁵

Elsewhere on the front of the IX. Corps enemy

¹ This division had fought at Ploegsteert 10th-12th April, and had gone back to the second line. It relieved the *36th Reserve Division* during the night of the 17th/18th for the purpose of the attack.

² *Fourth Army Diary*, p. 186. In Rupprecht ii., p. 386, it is stated: "About midday I learnt that the coup de main against Kemmel had failed".

³ See page 359, f.n. 2.

⁴ See page 347.

⁵ It would appear from "Kemmel 1918", by A. Goutard, pp. 3-5, that the British line was so thin that the advanced parties of the French 28th Division had great difficulty in discovering where it was, and "sometimes encountered hardly anyone before running up against the German lines".

concentrations were reported at various times and dispersed by fire, but no serious fighting occurred. Prisoners said that the attack would be renewed next day and that fresh divisions were being put into the line with the object of capturing Mount Kemmel. Counter preparations by the artillery were therefore ordered to begin at 2 A.M. on the 19th.

On the rest of the Second Army front, in the sectors of the XXII. and II. Corps, there was no very serious fighting, although in places there was heavy shelling. At 3 P.M. the enemy, taking advantage of a thickening mist, rushed the outpost line just north of Wytschaete and captured forty or fifty prisoners from the S. African Be (9th Dn); but the main line remained intact and the situation was easily restored.

The Belgian IV. Division d'armée (Corps), on the left of the II. Corps, was attacked about 11 A.M., but after two hours' fighting, the enemy was driven back, and the front quieted down.

At 3.45 P.M., in view of the obvious slackening of the enemy's effort, General Plumer issued the following orders for reliefs and movements.

General Robillot's command was to take the place of the IX. Corps in the line, with a slightly shortened front: the orders of the IX. Corps of the previous evening were confirmed as regards the French 28th Division taking over the responsibility for the defence of Mount Kemmel at noon; also for the relief by it of the 19th Dn and attached troops (less artillery) during the night of the 18th/19th April, the command passing to General Madelin at 6 A.M. on the 19th.

The XV. Corps, during the night of the 19th/20th, by extending the front of the 1st Australian Division to the left, was to take over that part of the IX. Corps front held by the 98th Bde and the two battalions of the French 133rd Divn, whilst the 3rd Cavalry Bde was to form its reserve; to compensate for this extension to the left, on the right of the Australians, the 4th Guards Be and 92nd Be, both of the 31st Dn, then in reserve, were to take over the front of the 2nd Australian Brigade.¹

The 100th brigade-battalion was to be withdrawn from the line and rejoin the 33rd Divn: on the same night (19th/20th), the French 34th Division was to relieve the

¹ On the night of the 21st/22nd, the 31st Dn took over a further part of the Australian front, up to the Hazebrouck—Bailleul railway.

portion of the IX. Corps line held by the 49th Divn (Wyatt's Force, etc.) thus coming in on the right of the French 28th Division: on the next night, 20th/21st, the French 133rd Divn was to take over the sector of the 34th Dn, next on the right: thus, the three French divisions would then come together, and at 6 A.M. on the 21st April the command of the IX. Corps sector—that is from near Meteren to a point between Kemmel and Wytschaete—was to pass from Lieut.-General Gordon to General Robillot, who would have the French 39th and 154th Divisions and three cavalry divisions in reserve.¹

The IX. Corps heavy artillery and the IX. Corps Squadron R.A.F. were to remain, also all the divisional artillery in the sector, until General Robillot agreed to their replacement by French artillery.

The IX. Corps (19th, 25th and 34th Dns) was to go in reserve to the Poperinghe—Proven area: the 33rd (its artillery remained with the 9th Dn) and 59th Divns, and the 40th Dn Composite Brigade,² were to proceed to back areas near Cassel, under the VIII. Corps headquarters (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston), which, on coming out of the line at Ypres on the 13th, when the withdrawal took place, had been sent there to superintend the digging of back lines.³

At the request of General Robillot, it was agreed to leave the Kemmel Defence Force, under Lieut.-Colonel Bousfield,⁴ with him until the French were thoroughly conversant with the Kemmel defences.

During the day, Sir Douglas Haig, accompanied by Major-General Sir N. Birch, his G.O.C. Royal Artillery, visited a number of headquarters: the XV. Corps at Wardrecques (5 miles south-east of St. Omer); the Cavalry Corps at Andre (near Aire); the IX. Corps at Norrent Fontes (3 miles north-west of Lillers); the I. Corps at Labuissière (5 miles south-west of Béthune); the First Army at Ranchicourt (9 miles south of Béthune); and the Third Army at Hesdin (15 miles east of G.H.Q. at Montreuil). From the Fourth Army information reached him that Villers Bretonneux and

¹ During the 18th April the 154th completed detrainment in the Poperinghe—Proven area; and the 39th began detraining in the area Rexpoede—Roosbrugge (about 12-18 miles west of Ypres).

² The 40th Dn artillery was with the 2nd Divn.

³ On the 20th, the 33rd Divn was sent to the VIII. Corps, and on the 21st, the 66th Dn (reduced to cadre).

⁴ See page 272, f.n. 1.

the neighbouring areas had been heavily shelled both on this and the preceding day. In view of the reports which he received at the various headquarters, he remained of the opinion that the enemy attacks in the north were designed to draw the Allied reserves there, with a view to renewing the offensive between Amiens and Arras.

On this day, at 4.50 A.M., on the right of the British Fourth (Fifth) Army south of the Somme, the French "18th Division, reinforced by a battalion of the 64th Division, by a fraction of the 131st Division on the right bank of the Avre, and by a battalion of the 65th south of the Ailly—Morisel road, and supported by a group of Schneider cars [tanks], and a numerous artillery and a powerful air force",¹ attacked the Germans with the object of getting up in line with the British force and preventing the British line from being enfiladed by gun-fire. It was the first offensive action taken by the French to relieve the British since the fighting began on the 21st March. Six hundred and fifty prisoners were captured, but an advance of only five hundred yards was made, and the object was not achieved. An attempt made next day (19th), with the help of another group of tanks, to improve matters, did not succeed any better. Any attack on such a small scale was bound to fail under enemy artillery fire which could be and was concentrated on it.

At this time a difference of opinion arose between French and British headquarters as to the strength of the available German reserves. General Pétain was uneasy at the "mass of enemy reserve divisions incessantly increasing". He expected at any moment to be heavily attacked, and was apprehensive that if a new French front was formed in Flanders reinforcements would be required for it and his power of resistance elsewhere gravely diminished. The French Intelligence "calculated on the 18th April that "there were 61 enemy divisions available behind the front, "whereas there had been only 46 on the 9th".² The British estimate compiled on a different basis, put the number of unused enemy divisions at 60; but of these, 39 were in the line and not immediately available, one in support on the Lys front, and 20 in reserve (13 opposite the British front and seven elsewhere on the Western Front). It seemed to G.H.Q. that German tired divisions withdrawn from the battle—and no large number had thus been treated

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 465.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 466.

—would require several weeks' rest and reorganization, as no German division was relieved until it was thoroughly exhausted, and must not be reckoned as "available". To calm General Pétain's fears in some degree, General Foch hit on the idea of transferring tired British divisions to the many quiet parts of the French front.

On this day, he despatched a Note to Sir Douglas Haig, in which he said that circumstances might arise, such as the continuation of the Flanders or Arras—Somme battles, rendering it imperative to send more French troops to the British sector: they must be taken from some quiet part of the front, such as Lorraine or the Vosges, after relief by troops which had already fought in the battle: the most suitable divisions for this purpose seemed to be British, for instance, the 29th, 31st and 50th, refitting in back areas. It was the first time that such interchange, or "roulement", as it was called, between French and British formations had been proposed. Next day, Commandant Gemeau, the French liaison officer at G.H.Q., brought the Commander-in-Chief a personal and secret letter from General Foch, in which he said he was anxious to maintain 15 French divisions behind the British Army, and he could not do so unless tired British divisions took the place in the line now held by the formations which he wanted. Sir Douglas Haig at once told Commandant Gemeau that he would do anything necessary to help to win the battle, and promised a favourable reply: but he added that it was desirable to tell General Foch that any idea of a permanent "amalgam" must at once be dismissed from his mind, because it would never work—the methods of fighting, organization and supply of the two Armies were so very different.

Lord Milner arrived at G.H.Q. about 3 p.m., on his way to London, to take up his duties on the 20th as Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby having been appointed Ambassador in Paris. On being shown General Foch's Note and letter, he agreed that it was necessary to meet the generalissimo's request, but only as a temporary measure. A cipher message was later received from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Sir H. Wilson), who had been informed of General Foch's proposal; in this he referred the Commander-in-Chief to Lord Kitchener's memorandum, given to him on taking over command, "which has not been altered by recent arrangements for command on the main front", and ended: "I presume that you are refusing".

Fortified by Lord Milner's concurrence, and General

Pétain's assurance that "the British divisions will first be placed in the reserve of the Sixth Army, into whose line they will be put after reconstitution",¹ the Commander-in-Chief replied to General Foch on the 19th that he was "in full agreement in principle" with his proposal, and anticipated that it would be possible without any considerable delay to send four divisions to relieve French divisions in a quiet portion of the front.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 18TH APRIL

Maps
24, 13.

On the evening of the 17th the *Sixth Army* ordered the attempts to advance near Bailleul to be stopped, on account of the arrival of French reinforcements. On the left wing of the Army, however, on the 18th, after four days' rest during which a great concentration of artillery had been effected, the *IV. Corps* (four divisions in front line and one in reserve), with the support of the *IX. Reserve Corps* (three divisions in front line and one in reserve), on its right, was to gain possession of Givenchy and Festubert and the line of the La Bassée canal as far as Robecq, in order to ensure the protection of the left wing.

The *Fourth Army*, under the misapprehension that the *Guard Corps* had reached the Steenebeek during the 17th, ordered it to continue the attack on the Belgians, advancing with the *58th* and *83rd Divisions* down the Staden railway south-westwards on Ypres. On the rest of the Army front, as a result of the discussions given in the Note at the end of the Chapter on the 17th April, the general offensive was to be stopped, and the corps were to prepare a methodical attack on the line Kemmel—Mont Noir. "In spite of the exhaustion of the divisions in the line, only the absolutely indispensable reliefs were authorized", that of the *17th Reserve* by the *3rd Guard Division*,² and the *36th Reserve* by the *31st*.

The failure to accomplish what was hoped is fully admitted in the German records. "The 18th April brought the *Sixth Army* another painful set-back on its left flank. The *IV. Corps*, supported by the *IX. Reserve Corps*, attacked Festubert and Givenchy according to plan, and nearly got possession of the whole of both villages, but was compelled to withdraw on account of counter-attacks, supported by the fire of uncaptured concrete machine-gun nests."

In the *Fourth Army*: "From early morning, things went wrong for the *Guard Corps*. The *6th Bavarian Division* proved to have been very badly shaken on the 17th and to be almost unfit for attack. It was hoped, however, that the attack of the *58th* and *83rd Divisions* would succeed in widening the supposed pocket

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 471.

² The *3rd Guard Division* had been engaged in the March offensive, but had had 14 days' rest.

“ beyond the Steenebeek. The two divisions would then push on
“ across the Yser and turn, one northwards and the other south-
“ wards, and the three divisions in reserve would then be put in. †

“ The *83rd Division*, coming up to reinforce the *58th Division*,
“ was so delayed by the difficult country through which it had to
“ pass that it could not get up in time, and the *Guard Corps* post-
“ poned the attack till the 19th April. In the afternoon it became
“ quite clear that not only was the *58th Division* not across the
“ Steenebeek, as it had reported on the 17th, but that the stream
“ was strongly held ; it was therefore decided to postpone further
“ attacks till the 20th April.”

CHAPTER XX

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

19TH-24TH APRIL 1918

A PAUSE

(Maps 24, 25 ; Sketch 25)

In the period 19th to 24th April there was a lull in the fighting in Flanders. Although indications seemed to point to the resumption of the main offensive on the Somme, actually the Germans were making methodical preparations for further operations against Kemmel. There was incessant and heavy shelling, particularly of Nieppe Forest, with gas, and of the neighbourhood of Kemmel, but nothing beyond some sharp minor engagements occurred, during which the I. Corps improved its position in the Givenchy sector and along the canal.

By the morning of the 21st, the French had completed the relief of the IX. Corps—except the small Kemmel Defence Force, of about nine hundred, under Lieut.-Colonel Bousfield, which remained. Thus the French 133rd Divn and the 34th and 28th Divisions—with the support of British heavy artillery and aviation, for General Foch had not yet sent them any¹—now held the 11,000 yards of front from east of Meteren to about Spanbroekmolen, covering Dranoutre and Kemmel, and had taken the place of the 19th, 25th and 34th Dns, which on the 24th were sent back to the VIII. Corps area near Cassel.² The weather was very cold and variable, there being snow and hail storms on the

¹ The IX. Corps Heavy Artillery (Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie) and the 21st Divn artillery (Br.-General H. W. Newcome) remained with General Robillot's corps.

² The 57th Be reported its strength as 36 officers and 960 men—it had received 700 reinforcements on 10th April—and the other brigades were equally weak.

19th and low clouds on the 23rd and 24th; nevertheless the Royal Air Force, as will be seen, was able to carry out a great deal of work.

On the 21st, the Adjutant-General's return showed that since the 21st March the number of casualties had amounted to nearly 250,000 of all ranks. Since the 27th March, 270,000 men had been sent from the base ports to the front, without counting the arrival on the 19th at Marseilles of the 52nd (Lowland) Division (Major-General J. Hill) from Palestine.

Lieut.-General Sir A. E. A. Holland (I. Corps) was not inclined to leave the enemy in peace. As good artillery observation was possible along the canal, the enemy was kept in a state of demoralization, and, except in Pacaut Wood, was allowed no more than shell-hole cover. At night his hiding places were treated with bursts of artillery fire, and by day if a man showed himself he was chased with bullets, while both by day and night infantry parties went out and, usually finding the Germans asleep, "winkled" them, as it was called, from their cover. On the 20th the 1/Northamptonshire regained most of the ground lost on the 18th north and north-east of Givenchy, and the 1/South Wales Borderers retook Route A Keep. German counter-attacks failed until, after a severe bombardment on the 22nd, the enemy recaptured the keep and held it against counter-attacks. On the 24th, however, the 55th Divn, which had relieved the 1st, came back into the line and, employing the 1/10th King's (Liverpool Scottish) of the 166th Bde (Br.-General R. J. Kentish), regained possession of it.¹

Map 24.
Sketch
25.

The 4th Divn, on the 19th, made a very successful surprise attack on Riez du Vinage, for the purpose of recovering all the ground lost on the previous night, and gained possession of a group of houses at the north-eastern exit. The 2/Essex captured 150 prisoners in the village, which had now changed hands four times, and then removed ten octogenarian inhabitants on stretchers. Continuous counter-attacks and fighting went on for several hours, in which part of the ground regained was lost. But all, and more, was recaptured during the night of the 20th/21st, while, in addition, posts were pushed out across the La Bassée canal, and the southern end of Pacaut Wood was

¹ The 55th Divn handed the keep over to the 46th Division, which lost it on the 26th and recaptured it on the 28th.

occupied. On the following night yet a little more ground was secured. On the morning of the 22nd a still more ambitious attack, for which three pontoon bridges were thrown in the face of much shelling of the canal bank, gained its objective, a strip of ground east of Pacaut Wood and up to the east-west road through the wood. The enemy reply on the 23rd was defeated, 35 prisoners and 13 machine guns being captured. On the same day a successful attempt was made by the 184th Bde (61st Divn, Br.-General A. W. Pagan), well supported by the 51st Dn artillery, to obliterate the re-entrant between Riez du Vinage and Baquerolles Farm. In this the 2/5th Gloucestershire with the 2/4th Oxford L.I. again took a prominent part, 121 prisoners and 10 machine guns being taken. At night owing to the continuous shelling of the new line a partial withdrawal was ordered, notwithstanding that a pocket was still held by a party of the enemy. But, with the help of the 4th Divn, the line was re-established during the following night.

Some amusement was caused among the troops of the I. Corps on the 23rd by the discovery that the Inland Water Transport Dépôt back at Aire and the Central Light Railway Workshops nearby at La Lacque, had elaborately prepared their establishments for burning by means of tow saturated with paraffin; they were only just prevented from sending them up in a blaze.

On the night of the 21st/22nd, the Germans began a series of nightly gas bombardments of Nieppe Forest, causing at first considerable casualties. The low, thick growth offered favourable conditions, and the moment was well chosen as a light railway was under construction for supply purposes. The German plan was to "pinch out" the forest by attacks on either side, after gassing its defenders; but the mustard gas casualties were soon reduced by the efforts of Lieut.-Colonel H. Hewetson, the A.D.M.S. of the 5th Division, who used his bearer companies to form patrols to warn passing troops of infected areas, in addition to special treatment squads to neutralize the poison in the craters formed by the gas shell. Casualties were quickly dealt with by means of bearer relay posts and advanced car posts, while retaliatory measures were also taken; for this purpose the 5th Division had, besides the support of its own field artillery (XV. and XXVII. Brigades), that of the 34th Dn (152nd and 160th Brigades), the LXXXIV. Army Brigade R.F.A. and the X. and LXXIX.

Brigades R.G.A. The guns replied vigorously to the German gas attack and on the succeeding nights heavily bombarded the enemy's billets and gun positions with gas shells, with the desired effect; for, after the night of the 23rd/24th, only intermittently did the enemy—on the nights of the 26th/27th and 28th/29th and 29th/30th—fire gas bombardments. The 5th Division continued harassing fire all round the clock, the batteries firing 300 to 600 rounds in the twenty-four hours, with counter-preparation bursts every night.

The 3rd Australian Brigade (Br.-General H. G. Bennett) Map 25. carried out an operation, in two phases, during the nights of the 22nd/23rd and 23rd/24th in order to recapture Meteren, where the Germans, on a spur, were half surrounded. The first stage, when a battalion closed in on either flank, was entirely successful; but the second, when the pincers should have closed, in bright moonlight, without a previous bombardment, and without accompanying field guns to deal with defended buildings, led to close fighting, in which the Australians inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy; but they lost 158 officers and men, and the companies engaged were withdrawn to the old outpost line. On the 23rd, at 8.40 P.M. the 4th Guards Bn, on the extreme right of the XV. Corps, made a very successful raid on Beaulieu farm, killing 30 and capturing 25 Germans with a loss of seven men slightly wounded.

On the French front, at 8 P.M. on the 23rd, the enemy, after a furious bombardment, attacked and captured from the 34th Division, Hille farm, (on a ridge south-west of Dranoutre), and held it against counter-attack, although the IX. Corps heavy artillery fired all night.¹ An attempt on the 24th to enlarge the gains failed.

In pursuance of General Foch's instruction, in his Directive of the 17th, that efforts should be made to regain the ground at the bottom of the slopes of the Flanders hills, and, if possible, Neuve Eglise and other commanding points lying in front, General Robillot issued orders on the 20th for local operations to be undertaken as soon as the relief was complete. He laid special stress on freeing Lindenhoeck and on consolidating Aircraft and Donegal Farms. The first of these operations was entrusted to the 28th Division, which considered that it should be carried out in two stages.

¹ The attack was made by nine companies of the 22nd Reserve Division, supported by 74 batteries, in order to prevent enfilade fire being brought to bear from the ridge against the projected advance on Kemmel.

The first was attempted on the night of the 24th/25th, and was unsuccessful.

In the XXII. Corps sector (9th and 21st Dns and 6th Divn, with a brigade of the 49th Divn in reserve), though there was heavy and incessant shelling, no infantry attack developed. In the II. Corps area, however, the enemy on the 19th rushed and captured a post on a hill between Zonnebeke and St. Julien, which gave good observation; it was retaken, but lost again during a snowstorm.

In the air, a great deal of work was done in directing fire on to hostile batteries; the number of patrol and reconnaissance flights was about forty each day until the 23rd and 24th, when, owing to unfavourable weather, the number fell to 29 and 23. Bombing, mainly on railways and trains—at least one ammunition train was blown up—was regularly carried out, 13½, 27½, 30, 36, 10½ and 26½ tons being dropped on the six days respectively. The enemy activity was summarized as “slight” and “by no means aggressive”, except on the 20th, when it was fairly active, and on the 23rd, “slight until 5 P.M., after which there “was fighting”.

On the night of the 22nd/23rd, naval light forces made the blocking raid on Ostend and Zeebrugge. It caused considerable consternation at Crown Prince Rupprecht's headquarters but did not affect the military operations.¹

General de Mitry, appointed to command the D.A.N.,² arrived on the 19th, and whilst his staff was assembling at Boulogne, came to Second Army headquarters. After a conference with Generals Plumer and Robillot, he gave orders for the organization and disposal of his forces. On the 21st, General Nolle (XXXVI. Corps) would have under him the 34th Division and 133rd Divn, with the 2nd Cavalry Division (dismounted) in reserve: during the night of the 22nd/23rd, the 154th Division (General Breton) from Alsace would be interpolated between the 34th and 28th Divisions, and General Robillot would then assume command of it and the 28th, with the 3rd Cavalry Division (dismounted) in reserve. Under his own hand, with his headquarters at Esquelbecq (7 miles N.N.W. of

¹ See “Naval Operations” Vol. V., pp. 241-77. According to Rupprecht ii., p. 389, Ostend remained available for U-boats, the two block ships having been sunk clear of the fairway. “It was otherwise at Zeebrugge. . . . who knows how long the exit of our U-boats from Zeebrugge is blocked?”

² See page 350.

Cassel), he retained the 39th Division (General Massenet) from Lorraine and the 6th Cavalry Division (mounted).

On the 20th M. Clemenceau paid a visit to Sir Douglas Haig and discussed, amongst other matters, the advisability of replacing the British troops next to the Belgians by French, in order to reduce the number of nationalities in the Ypres sector, which was detrimental to effective defence in case of heavy attack. Both were in agreement on this matter. The necessity of recovering Wytschaete in order to prevent Kemmel being turned from the north-east was also mentioned. The Commander-in-Chief urged that the French south of the Somme should continue their activity.¹ General Pershing and his Chief of the Staff, Major-General J. G. Harbord, also came to G.H.Q. and discussed the scheme for training American infantry in British divisions. Sir Douglas Haig offered to hand over six divisional artilleries for the use of American divisions when the infantry brigades had been sufficiently trained to be grouped into divisions, a scheme of which General Pershing approved.

On the 21st, General Foch replied to Sir Douglas Haig's letter of the 18th, forwarding General Plumer's report on the situation on his front, in which he had asked for a minimum of three divisions without delay.² The Generalissimo said that the British demand for reinforcements for the Second Army amounted to eight divisions in all : that he had already sent three cavalry and five infantry divisions, which he considered equivalent to six divisions : in addition, the Belgians had relieved one division and one brigade of the British forces :³ these measures had enabled General Plumer to withdraw seven divisions plus one brigade for refitting :⁴ he therefore considered that Sir Douglas Haig's wishes had been met and that the Second Army was now so reorganized as to be able to carry out its task. General Foch wrote, however, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to enquire whether it would not be possible to send "some marines (about two brigades)" to defend Calais. The Admiralty refused to entertain the idea ; but the First

¹ M. Clemenceau went on to Second Army headquarters to meet General Foch, and asked to see a British infantry brigade which had just come out of the fight. He was shown the 98th Bde (33rd Divn), then at Cassel ; it was only about a thousand strong. On seeing it he exclaimed, " Mon Dieu, c'est tout ! "

² See page 354.

³ Actually, the 30th Divn and one battalion of the 36th Divn.

⁴ Actually, the 40th Dn and 59th and 33rd Divns had been withdrawn ; the 19th, 25th and 34th Dns were on the point of being withdrawn.

Sea Lord forwarded to General Foch a copy of a report in which he demonstrated how disastrous the abandonment of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne would be for the supply of the Army, the defence against submarines, and sea transport to the Port of London, and insisted that the High Command should take serious account of these considerations, if it became a question of deciding whether or not these ports should be defended to the last. General Foch was further informed that if Dunkirk were to be abandoned, the Admiralty had parties of marines with suitable explosives ready for the destruction of the docks; to this he replied that he did not regard the situation as so critical.

General Foch, however, did order various measures to reinforce the north: on the 19th, he directed General Maistre (Tenth Army) to move forward another division to the north of Frévent, ready to assist the British First Army, in place of the 34th, which had been sent to the D.A.N.; on the 22nd, he asked General Pétain to send a division from his reserves outside the battle area—the 27th from Alsace was selected—with a view to replacing the 138rd Divn, which had been engaged before it had been reconstituted: he also directed General Maistre, leaving the XIV. Corps (14th and 129th Divisions) south-east of Doullens, to push forward the heads of the columns of the XVI. Corps (31st and 32nd Divisions) to Heuchin—Pernes (10 miles W.S.W. of Béthune): to replace these General Pétain was to move the 46th and 47th Divisions, belonging to the XX. Corps¹ of the Fifth Army, up to Villers Bocage—Canaples (10 miles south-west of Doullens) to be at the call of the Tenth Army.² At the same time, he urged that more rear lines should be constructed behind the British First Army. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, in a letter to Sir Douglas Haig, expressed the opinion that the Generalissimo was living from hand to mouth and not taking a sufficiently long view.

In the matter of instructions, on the 22nd General Foch sent a Note to the Commander-in-Chief, with the request that, if he approved, he would send it on to General Plumer without delay. In this Note he said that both General Plumer and General Gillain had considered the hypothesis of a German attack from the Ypres area in the direction of

¹ Consisting of the 11th, 153rd, 46th and 47th Divisions.

² To replace the 46th and 47th Divisions General Pétain brought two more from the east, so that he had the 11th and 153rd Divisions in the former area of the Tenth Army west of Amiens; the 3rd, 66th and 72nd at Beauvais; and the I. Cavalry Corps (General Féraud) east of Paris.

Poperinghe, at the point of junction of the British and Belgian Armies : it was evident that the closest co-operation between the troops in the sector was essential to ensure foot-by-foot resistance, supported by carefully prepared local counter-attacks : there must be a common plan for the employment of the reserves, British, French and Belgian, and a common plan of action for the co-operation of the artillery : he therefore asked that Generals Plumer and Gillain might meet without delay in order to arrange all details, and let him know the result.

This communication crossed a letter from Sir Douglas Haig to General Foch forwarding a report of a conference held on the 21st at Houthem, the Belgian G.H.Q., between General Gillain, representatives of G.H.Q. and the headquarters Staff of the Second Army. At this the tactical boundary between the two Armies and the question of the construction of rear lines of defence, including a bridgehead at Watten on the canal below St. Omer, had been settled. In the covering letter the Commander-in-Chief mentioned that, if it became necessary at any time to shorten the present line by falling back to one or other of the rear systems, the question of creating salt-water inundations in the coastal region would arise, and he asked General Foch's views on and assistance in the matter.

On receipt of this letter and report, General Foch, on the 23rd, issued a formal order giving effect to the arrangements agreed upon, and he promised that the question of inundations should be studied by his Staff.

Finally, on the 24th, the Commander-in-Chief sent to General Foch the notes of a further conference of the Belgian and British General Staffs, and a report by General Plumer as to his future policy. At the conference it had been agreed that the Belgian Army should hold one division and a cavalry division in reserve ready to support the right of the Belgian line, and that the Second Army should keep one division north and north-west of Poperinghe for the same purpose, and two more divisions, as further reinforcement, in case of need, in the same area : these reserves would prevent any gap occurring at the junction of the Armies, and the direction of the action of the reserves in various contingencies was laid down. As regards the policy of the Second Army, work had been begun on the improvement of the front defences, so as to form a line of resistance covered by strong outposts : all corps were to make preparation to improve their positions, the XXII. Corps was

to recover Wytschaete, the D.A.N., Spanbroekmolen, the XV. Corps, Meteren, and push forward from the north-eastern portion of Nieppe Forest : later, it was hoped to regain possession of Neuve Eglise : although defence was to be active, the construction of rear lines was to be continued : arrangements were to be specially made to meet the two most probable enemy attacks—north of Ypres to turn the British left flank, and against Kemmel from the east—but the possibility of attempts to facilitate the capture of Hazebrouck or Kemmel by an advance between Meteren and Wytschaete was not to be overlooked : all details had been worked out for local counter-attacks at short notice, and a deliberate counter-attack by three divisions from the IX. Corps and one division from the XXII. to recapture Wytschaete—St. Eloi ($2\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Wytschaete) and a line beyond, whilst the French took Spanbroekmolen. There were other details, and General Plumer concluded by giving the two general principles which he wished to see maintained, first that the D.A.N. should be kept together—although its reserves might be sent to the right or the left—and, secondly, that any threat against the Belgians should be met by reinforcing the II. Corps with British divisions in reserve.

In spite of a serious protest from General Pétain that the exchange of fresh French for tired British divisions would weaken the offensive power of the French Armies, “ which only demand to fight ”, the details for the “ roulement ” were worked out ; Lieut.-General Sir A. H. Gordon was sent to the French Sixth Army headquarters, and, at General Foch’s request, it was settled that the 50th Dn should begin entraining on the 25th, the artillery, still in the line, following later.

The great question was where the enemy, who had the initiative and the necessary reserves and had obviously only suspended operations for the purpose of reorganization, would strike next. Would he do so with his right or with his left ? That it would be either towards Amiens, on the front between Montdidier and Albert, or in Flanders, appeared, from the position of his troops, to be fairly certain. The French Intelligence expected an attack specially between Grivesnes (5 miles north-west of Montdidier) and the Somme ; the British thought that it would be directed to enlarging the salient between La Bassée and Wytschaete, but a blow nearer the coast could not be ruled out : possibly, the enemy would, before striking elsewhere, try to draw

more French reserves to Flanders. From midday on the 21st the absence of all wireless activity north of the Ypres—Comines canal was most marked, and this state of things had been noticed before the great attacks of the 21st March, 28th March (Arras) and 9th April (Lys). On the 22nd, it was observed from the air that the Germans were hard at work improving their communications in Flanders, and that there were the usual signs of an impending attack against Dranoutre. Prisoners spoke of the renewal of the attacks to gain possession of Kemmel.

The German artillery was found to be arranged in two main groups, one south-east of Kemmel, directed against Kemmel, the other south-west of Bailleul, directed against Mont Noir, with a small group near Neuve Eglise, and the fire of this artillery on the Flanders hills, particularly on Kemmel, was very heavy on the days preceding the 25th.

On the 24th, the presence of the *Alpine Corps*, brought round from Bailleul, was discovered opposite Kemmel. No attack materialized on this day, but the Germans took the offensive in the Villers Bretonneux sector, as will be related in the next chapter.

NOTE

THE GERMANS IN FLANDERS, 19TH-24TH APRIL

At 7.45 P.M. on the 18th April, when hopes still rose high that the offensive north of Ypres would be successful, Ludendorff, in conference with Crown Prince Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff, and the Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, came more or less to an agreement as to the plan of operations to be followed, and the *Fourth Army* issued orders accordingly.

The *Guard Corps* was to continue the attack from the north against the Ypres Salient, and the *XVIII. Reserve* and *X. Reserve*, from the south, against Kemmel. The corps commanders were, after discussion, to recommend the date on which the offensive should take place; meanwhile the artillery would begin the preparatory bombardment. But it soon became known that the attacks against the Belgians had been a complete fiasco.

At 8 A.M., therefore, the *Fourth Army* notified the *Guard Corps* that the attack against the northern flank of the Ypres Salient was to be discontinued, but that attempts should be made to drive the enemy back from the east bank of the Steenebeek. The three reserve divisions of the corps (*13th Reserve*, *19th Reserve* and *233rd*) were to be sent south to take part in the forthcoming operations against Kemmel, which were to be carried out by the *XVIII. Reserve* and *X. Reserve Corps* on the 25th April. Map 25.

General von Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, visited the two corps to discuss details. At first, he wished the

XVIII. Reserve Corps, whose left wing faced the ridge at the edge of the small plateau on which Vroilandhoek and Lindenhoek stand, to make a preliminary attack on the evening of the 23rd to capture them, so that the right of the *X. Reserve Corps* should not suffer from enfilade fire when the main attack was launched on the 25th April. This plan was received coldly by the commander of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, who pointed out that a preliminary attack would give warning of the larger effort which was to follow, and would cause unnecessary disturbance to a sector of the front that was being prepared for the main operation against Mount Kemmel. The question was therefore left in abeyance until a conference on the 21st. Meanwhile, at 9.30 A.M. on the 20th, just before the Kaiser arrived at Army headquarters, the *Fourth Army* issued orders for the main attack.

The *Sixth Army* was ordered by Crown Prince Rupprecht to remain on the defensive, as the enemy opposing it appeared to have been strengthened. On the 20th April, O.H.L. gave instructions that, although the *Sixth Army* was to act defensively, the capture of Festubert and Givenchy must be borne in mind, and the factories in Béthune were to be kept continuously under fire. On the same day, O.H.L. decided to stop the offensive in Flanders, but, as the two wings of the attack were hanging back, that the operations against Festubert—Givenchy by the *Sixth Army*, and against Kemmel by the *Fourth Army* should be continued so as to have more elbow room.¹

Two days later, on the 22nd, Crown Prince Rupprecht's headquarters issued orders that, if the attack on Kemmel went well, the left wing of the *Fourth Army* (*Guard Reserve Corps*) and the right wing of the *Sixth Army* (*III. Bavarian Corps*) must be prepared to advance.

On the 21st, the *Fourth Army* conference, at which Ludendorff was present, was held at the headquarters of the *X. Reserve Corps*; the idea of a preliminary attack on the 23rd against Vroilandhoek and Lindenhoek was abandoned. It was agreed that, in its stead, the left wing of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* should, on the 25th, start fifteen minutes before the *X. Reserve Corps* in order to clear the ridge on which the two villages stand before the last-named corps got level with it. As enfilade fire could be brought against the left of the *X. Reserve Corps* during its advance, from the Allied line south-west of Dranoutre, this corps was, on the 23rd, to capture the ridge on which Salon (Hille) Farm stood, which was done, as has been related in the text.

The orders were then finally approved. They will be given in the narrative of the 25th April.

¹ Kuhl ii., p. 348.

CHAPTER XXI

24TH-27TH APRIL 1918

ATTACK AND COUNTER-ATTACK AT VILLERS BRETONNEUX

(Map 11 ; Sketches 11, 26)

THE German March offensive had come to an end on the 5th April in front of Amiens. At 8 P.M. on that day the situation was considered "reasonably quiet", so much so that the III. Corps Staff (Lieut.-General Sir R. H. K. Butler) could be directed to relieve the wearied Staff of the XIX. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir H. E. Watts). The Allies had not sufficient forces available for a great counter-offensive, but the Fourth (Fifth) Army astride the Somme and the French First Army, on its right, both of which covered Amiens, by no means settled down to a quiet time. To quote a German account: "The Allies saw to it that the 'Michael' Armies "did not rest. . . . There was a series of lively counter-attacks, which for the most part affected the German positions on either side of the Luce. . . . The unrest "occasioned by these frequent combats and the constant "bombardment of the back areas to a considerable depth was "very great, and it tried the troops to a very high degree."¹

The German *Second Army* did not, however, abandon all hope of pushing nearer to Amiens, and began to make plans to do so south of the Somme when sufficient troops were available. These plans, however, were gradually reduced in scope and their execution postponed several times, to the 20th, and then to the 23rd. The attack finally did not take place until the 24th, and then for the purpose of rounding off the salient facing Amiens by the capture of Villers Bretonneux and the small plateau on which it stands: at the same time it was hoped that it would serve as a diversion to assist the battle in progress near Kemmel.²

¹ Schwarte iii., p. 456.

² See Note at end of Chapter.

Map 11. To mention some of the actions which occurred during this period : on the 7th April, the 5th Australian Brigade (Br.-General R. Smith), which had only come into the line on the night of the 5th/6th, next to the French First Army, by higher order attacked Bois de Hangard in the early morning. Only three companies were employed for the purpose and they reached their objective, capturing 56 Germans ; but they were unable to remain in the wood owing to enfilade fire, and so returned to their starting line.¹

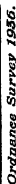
As a diversion during this attack, the 15th Australian Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Elliott) advanced and gained ground towards Hamel.

An attack on a larger scale to retake Moreuil, Moreuil Wood, Bois de Hangard and Lancer Wood, in combination with the French, was planned for the night of the 7th/8th. The French were not ready, and the operation was postponed to the 10th. Before it could materialize, on the evening of the 9th, the Germans attacked and captured Hangard, but the French retook the village the same night. After a feint on the 11th, further south towards Moreuil by two battalions, Hangard, with the exception of the cemetery and an adjacent copse, which the Germans had regained in the morning, was retaken on the 12th by a counter-attack, in which the British 53rd Bde (18th Divn) assisted. On the 15th, with the help of the 5th Australian Brigade, the French regained the cemetery. South of Hangard the French line turned back sharply to Bois de Sénécat (west of Castel which was in German hands), leaving the heights in the abandoned angle free to the enemy for observation and fire over the British flank and rear. General Rawlinson and his commanders were not unnaturally most dissatisfied with the situation, which gave the Villers Bretonneux position a very weak right flank ; accordingly on the 15th he reported to Sir Douglas Haig that during the past ten days he had frequently represented the difficulty of the position in which his right was involved to the French authorities, and received nothing but promises in reply. On the 18th, the French did, as already noticed,² make a small attack with little more than a division near Castel, but only gained about five hundred yards, although they drove the enemy completely out of Bois de Sénécat.

¹ Lieut. P. V. Storkey, 19th Australian Battalion, was awarded the V.C. for his gallantry on this occasion.

² See page 366.

Sketch 26.



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3050/30

On the 16th April, the rumours of a new German offensive against Amiens seemed to be definitely confirmed. A German prisoner, taken by the French, volunteered the statement that Villers Bretonneux was to be attacked next day. The 5th Australian Division, which had come into the line on the night of the 6th/7th April, and held the sector from Villers Bretonneux (inclusive) to the Somme canal, was warned to be ready to retake the town, if captured, by attack from the north ; and other preparations and counter-preparations were made. About 4 A.M. on the 17th, Villers Bretonneux, Bois d'Aquenne, to the west of it, and the village of Cachy, to the south, were heavily drenched for three hours with phosgene, mustard and irritant gases. But no assault followed. As soon as possible the local garrison, consisting of the 6/London (58th Divn) and the 33rd Australian Battalion, was got out of the shelters in the town into the trenches around it. The gas shelling was repeated in the evening from 4 to 7 P.M., and again next morning and on the following days, being increased so as to include Bois l'Abbé, but with greatly reduced results. Nevertheless it was impossible for anyone to move about in that area without feeling some ill-effects from the mustard gas, and there were, in all, 1,074 gas casualties. Sketch 26.

The gassing of Villers Bretonneux seemed to point to the probability of its not being attacked, but by this time air photographs had revealed the signs of imminent operations ; an increase in the number of enemy batteries had also been noticed, while the roads were being registered by German artillery. There were, however, also indications that the Albert sector might be the objective of an attack which might extend to Arras and Vimy Ridge. On the 21st there was much air fighting near the Somme, and the famous German airman Richthofen was brought down.¹ That night a man of the *4th Guard Division*, captured by the 8th Divn, disclosed the fact that his formation had just relieved the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* in front of Marcelcave, and would attack Villers Bretonneux at 3 A.M. on the 23rd. Counter-preparations were continued, and the German railway centres were bombed, particularly Chaumes.² No infantry assault materialized on the 23rd,

¹ See "The War in the Air" Vol. IV., pp. 389-93.

² That the roads and rear areas were well shelled and bombed is clear from the history (p. 515) of the *5th Guard Grenadier Regt. (4th Guard Division)* :

"Whilst the *1st and 2nd Companies* were marching up the Roman road " on the 21st they were attacked by aircraft : both company commanders,

but two deserters came in from the *77th Reserve Division*, just arrived from Russia, which had entered the line on the 20th, south of the *4th Guard Division*, opposite Cachy, and the French captured a gunner of the *Guard Ersatz Division* opposite Hangard. All these men said that the relief of the line divisions by "storm" divisions had been completed:¹ the infantry were ready to advance; the bombardment would begin early on the 24th and last two-and-a-quarter hours: and the attack would be assisted by 15 new German tanks, which were already in position near the front line.² It is from the fact that tanks were used to punch a hole in the British line on either side of Villers Bretonneux, and that, in consequence, the Germans gained possession of the town and ground on either side for a short time, that the fighting on the 24th derives its interest.

"all platoon commanders and twenty other ranks were severely or lightly wounded by bombs." When approaching Marcelcave, "suddenly British shells fell on the marching column of the *1st Company* and there were fresh losses". In marching through Marcelcave the *3rd Company* "received a direct hit by which 26 members of the company were killed or wounded".

The account given in the history (p. 267) of the *1st Jäger Battalion* of the *Jäger Division*, which, fresh from Russia, came into reserve at Marcelcave on the night of the 25th/26th, is more impressive:

"Even during the first night march into the battle zone, the *Jäger* received from the muzzles of the British and French artillery a most impressive object lesson in the fighting methods of the Western Front. For many kilometres well behind the German front the approach roads lay under continuous accurate fire. It was quite impossible for closed formations to use these roads. Unceasingly the companies had to make detours. In pitchy darkness, they felt their way along the side of the roads. At one place a half section stumbled head-over-heels in a shell-hole full of water; at another, the remains of a wire entanglement tore trousers, coat and skin. Meanwhile, salvoes of eight to twelve shrapnel broke like lightning through the night, and drove us all struggling painfully through the devastated land to press our faces into the slimy earth. . . . The reserve position at Marcelcave showed the traces of fearful destruction by enemy gunfire. The trenches were for the most part flattened out. Only a few *Jäger* found the protection of a parapet; the majority had to get what cover they could in the numerous and mostly suspiciously fresh shell-holes. It was, however, quite immaterial where one lay; heavy shells came down almost vertically. They struck straight like hammers and crushed out life in the trenches and in the shell holes with the same rage and indifference. There was nothing for the *Jäger* to do but to lie as close as possible to the damp clayey earth, and wait, day and night; an eternity. . . . More and more new craters appeared; the air was full of the whine and roar of great projectiles, which the enemy hurled against the *Jäger* from his inexhaustible supply."

¹ The *19th Division* and *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* had been relieved by the *77th Reserve*, *4th Guard* and *228th*, and, with the German *Jäger*, were to furnish reserves. The new divisions lay astride the Villers Bretonneux—Chaulnes railway, facing Cachy—Villers Bretonneux.

² They were actually at Wiencourt, 1½ miles east of Marcelcave.

Confirmation of the rumours of an imminent attack was obtained by a British airman who reported that the trenches in and around Bois de Hangard were packed with troops. So all that night Allied guns swept the probable routes and assembly points on the suspected front, and airmen, in spite of unfavourable weather, bombed billeting areas, railways and dumps. At least one ammunition train and an ammunition dump were hit, the conflagrations thereby caused serving as beacons to light the pilots home.

Considering the weariness of the troops after the long battle and the untrained state of the young reinforcements, much work had been done on the defences. Four rear lines had been sketched out in the Villers Bretonneux area, between the Avre and the Somme; but the trenches were shallow, the wire was very poor, there were no communication trenches, and no dug-outs nor shelters, except in the cellars of the village. The lines were (1) the reserve line behind the town, through Gentelles and Bois l'Abbé to the Somme near Aubigny, with one switch to the front line from Gentelles past Cachy and Bois d'Aquenne round the front of Villers Bretonneux, and another, dug by the 5th Australian Division as right flank protection inside the area; (2) about fifteen hundred yards in rear, the Bois Line, in front of Bois de Gentelles and Bois de Blangy to the Somme; (3) the Blangy Tronville Line, about two thousand five hundred yards further in rear, in front of St. Nicolas and Blangy Tronville; (4) the Glisy Line, another mile in rear, from north of Boves to Glisy. Posts to guard the river crossings had also been begun, and details of an inundation scheme had been worked out by the Chief Engineer of the Fourth Army, Major-General R. U. H. Buckland, by which an obstacle six hundred yards wide could be formed near the junction of the Avre and Somme, just east of Amiens.

The ground on the plateau between the Avre and Somme east of the Cachy—Villers Bretonneux line is flat, falling on each side to the rivers; it is arable and hard—the Santerre, famed for its wheat—with no obstacles and in April 1918 only a few scattered shell craters. It was practically impassable in daylight under machine-gun fire, but very suitable for tank action. Behind the Cachy—Villers Bretonneux line were a number of woods, Bois d'Aquenne, Bois l'Abbé and Bois de Blangy, really continuous, separated only by roads, and here the surface of the ground as the plateau narrows is broken by minor valleys.

The Fourth Army, under General Rawlinson, now consisted of the III. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir R. H. K. Butler)—which on the 21st March had been the right of the Fifth Army—and the Australian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. R. Birdwood). The former contained the 58th, 8th (formerly in the XIX. Corps, in place of the 14th) and 18th (less one brigade) Divns, and the latter the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions. The boundary between the corps, after the 25th Bde of the 8th Divn had on the night of the 20th/21st relieved part of the 14th Australian Brigade, was about twelve hundred yards north of the Villers Bretonneux—Amiens chaussée (Roman road). The third brigade of the 18th Divn and one of the 4th Australian Division were in Fourth Army reserve.¹

On the right of the III. Corps, the boundary line of which ran just north of Hangard, lay the French XXXI. Corps (General Toulorge) with the 64th and 131st Divisions, of the French First Army (General Debeney); it held the four-mile flank of the French line from Bois de Sénécat to Hangard (inclusive).

The morning of the 24th was very foggy, much like that of the 21st March, and the bombardment, which opened at 3.45 A.M., was also of the same character as on that day: first gassing and shelling of roads and rear areas, including Amiens, and of the batteries, and finally shelling of the front position. It lasted, however, only two-and-a-quarter hours, covering the front from Bois de Sénécat to the Somme. The attack fell on the line from Hangard (inclusive) to about fifteen hundred yards north of the Roman road, including no more than a company front of the 5th Australian Division, with diversions or feints on the right near Castel and Thennes in the French XXXI. Corps sector, and on the left, immediately north of the Somme in the sector of the 29th Australian Battalion (8th Brigade). Thus, it was the extreme left of the French 131st Division² and the fronts of the 58th and 8th Divns which were affected, both the latter barely reconstructed after their losses in March.³

The 58th Divn (Major-General A. B. E. Cator) had the 173rd Bde (Br.-General R. B. Worgan) in the front line,

¹ The 1st Australian Division had gone north to the Lys battle; of the other two brigades of the 4th, one was still near Hébuterne, and the other was out of the line.

² F.O.A. (vi.) i. does not give the name of the unit in question.

³ The 8th had lost 237 officers and 4,632 other ranks; the 58th, 121 and 2,244.

with all three battalions (3rd, 2/2nd and 2/4th London) up. Behind it was the 175th (Br.-General M. E. Richardson), with two battalions (9th and 12/London) in the reserve line around Cachy, and the 2/10th London a short distance ahead, in a small valley, as counter-attack battalion to the 173rd Bde. The 174th Bde (Br.-General C. G. Higgins) was in divisional reserve at Cagny (6 miles west of Cachy). The division held the front from the boundary with the French to just short of the Monument.¹ The 8th Divn (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker) held the line with the 23rd and 25th Bdes (Br.-Generals G. W. St. G. Grogan and C. Coffin). The former had during the night of the 23rd/24th, relieved the 24th (Br.-General R. Haig), which was suffering from the gas shelling of Villers Bretonneux; it had the 2/West Yorkshire and 2/Middlesex in the front line covering Villers Bretonneux, and the 2/Devonshire, as counter-attack battalion, immediately south of the town. The 25th Bde had the 2/Rifle Brigade in the front line, and the 2/R. Berkshire, as counter-attack battalion, north of the town; the third battalion, the 2/East Lancashire, was in trenches around Villers Bretonneux for its close defence, under direct command of the division. The 24th Bde was in divisional reserve, with the 2/Northamptonshire and 1/Worcestershire (less 2 companies) in the reserve line; the two other Worcestershire companies reinforced by two of the 6/Northamptonshire (54th Bde) were in the Cachy Switch, while the 1/Sherwood Foresters were in the Blangy Tronville Line. The 53rd and 54th Bdes (Br.-Generals H. W. Higginson and L. W. de V. Sadleir-Jackson), the latter less two companies in corps reserve, were south and south-east of Amiens.

Thus, without reckoning the R.E. field companies and the pioneer battalions which were working on the defences and, with the exception of the 22/Durham L.I. (pioneers of the 8th Divn) in the reserve line, were quartered behind the Boves—Glisy Line, the III. Corps was well distributed in depth. Six battalions were in front position, with three behind them for local counter-attack; 3½ in reserve line, two in the Cachy Switch and Villers Bretonneux, and one in the Blangy Tronville Line; three at Cagny east of Amiens, and 5½ in general reserve. The machine-gun battalions and trench-mortar batteries, were disposed among the infantry. Under the corps were also nine heavy and seven whippet tanks, in a little wood a mile south of Blangy

¹ See page 126, f.n. 2.

Tronville, with four more heavy tanks directly under the 8th Divn in Bois l'Abbé. But from want of troops no large body was available for immediate counter-attack.

The 58th Divn was covered by four field artillery brigades under Br.-General J. McC. Maxwell, and the 8th by three, under Br.-General H. W. A. Christie (20th Divn,) with the usual section of forward guns per brigade; whilst under the C.R.A. of the 18th Divn (Br.-General W. Evans), there were two brigades, disposed to defend the reserve line.

The III. Corps heavy artillery (Br.-General A. E. J. Perkins), consisting of 89 guns of the XIV., XXII., LI., LXVIII. and LXIX. Brigades R.G.A., had most of its batteries approximately on the line Fouencamps—Bois de Gentelles—Bois de Blangy, that is behind the reserve line: the LXVIII. Brigade could fire directly on the French front immediately to the right of the III. Corps; there was one battery forward north-west of Villers Bretonneux, and the whole of the XIV. Brigade and three batteries of the LI. were further back, west of Boves.¹

In the early morning the fog was so dense that visibility in some places extended only to 30 or 40 yards, and near Villers Bretonneux the enemy thickened the fog with smoke. By 8 A.M. visibility had improved a little, so that men could be distinguished at a hundred yards, and as the day wore on it grew still better, although it remained so very poor that little air work could be done. Contact patrols, flying at a hundred feet, managed from time to time to report the general situation, but very few bombing attacks took place.

During the evening of the 23rd, thirteen German tanks—a fourteenth had become unserviceable from engine trouble at the last moment—heavier and clumsier than the British, protected by huge, dish-like steel covers, had been assembled at Wiencourt.² They were divided into three groups of three, six and four respectively, and at 3.30 A.M. on the 24th proceeded to their starting places, north and south of Marcelcave. *Group I.* was to advance at 5.50 A.M. north of the railway directly against Villers Bretonneux; *Group II.*, south of the railway, between the town and Cachy; and *Group III.*, against Cachy.

¹ Further details of the artillery and other matters will be found in the Southern Command pamphlet "Tour of the Battlefields of 1918 "between Amiens and Avesnes", published by H.M. Stationery Office.

² There is a lengthy account in Volckheim.

Behind them, the *228th* and *4th Guard Divisions*, *77th Reserve Division* and *208th Division* were ready to advance ¹ against the whole front of the *58th* and *8th Divns*, that is four divisions against two, with the *19th Division*, the *9th Bavarian Reserve Division* and the *Jäger Division* ² in reserve, whilst the *Guard Ersatz Division* attacked Hangard and demonstrated on the front of the French *131st Division*.

At 6 A.M. the assault came. The approach of the tanks and of the infantry was concealed by the fog and by the noise of the bombardment, and the enemy crossed the five to six hundred yards of No Man's Land, and reached the front line almost unnoticed. Wherever tanks appeared the British line was broken: they got astride the trenches and shot down the men in them, so that a number of the young soldiers surrendered to the following infantry. Having no tank-defence weapons they could make no effective reply; one officer shot in vain with his revolver point-blank at the rear face of a tank.³ Thus Cacy Switch was reached by the Germans, but the reserve line was held intact. Wherever the enemy infantry attacked without tanks it was repulsed; but, owing to the break in the centre of the corps line, the flanks had to conform to the withdrawal, so that the left of the *173rd*, and the *23rd* and *25th Bdes* were swept back, and a pocket four miles wide and a mile deep was formed, Villers Bretonneux being lost.

In the *173rd Bde*, the left battalion repulsed the enemy infantry attack with heavy loss, but the tanks finally forced it to retire, at first five hundred yards, but ultimately to Cacy Switch, where it re-formed shortly after 10 A.M. The centre battalion conformed by swinging back; but the right battalion repulsed all attacks and held its position all day, until in the evening the loss of Hangard by the French caused it to make a short withdrawal. The counter-attack battalion, the *2/10th London*, after losing Lieut.-Colonel W. F. J. Symonds, whilst moving forward at 10 A.M., was stopped by machine-gun fire from Bois de Hangard, but was able to fill a gap in the line between the centre and left battalions of the *173rd Bde*. The Germans,

¹ The *77th Reserve Division* was fresh from the Eastern Front, the three others had fought in the March offensive, but had had 12-18 days' rest.

² The *Jäger* did not reach Marcelcave until the night of the 25th/26th.

³ *Group I.* claimed 6 officers and about 160 men as prisoners; *Group II.* 224; for *Group III.* no claim is made, as one of its tanks "fell into an "undermined hole on to its right side" (it was found thus in a quarry), and its crew surrendered, a second received three shell hits and crawled back, and the other two were engaged before Cacy.

however, had been held up by machine-gun nests ; their progress grew slow until, disheartened by heavy losses, they halted short of Cachy and the flank which had been formed.¹

The 23rd Bde, covering Villers Bretonneux, was attacked by *Nos. I. and II. Tank Groups* followed by flame-projectors, and its front line overwhelmed.² The support line was held for a short time ; but the 2/West Yorkshire, reduced to 140 men, defended the railway station until 9 A.M., when the advance of the enemy into the town led to a further retirement, and the survivors were withdrawn to the reserve line. The 2/Middlesex, similarly, fell back down the railway to two successive positions and then to the reserve line. In the 25th Bde, the 2/Rifle Brigade, not attacked in front by tanks, held its ground at first—assisted by the German artillery which shelled the assailants—but three companies, attacked by tanks in rear and in superior numbers in front, were eventually overwhelmed ; the left company remained in position until 8.30 A.M. when, with battalion headquarters, it formed a defensive flank.

Owing to gas the 2/East Lancashire, defending Villers Bretonneux, could not keep men in the town,³ and only occupied its eastern edge. Attacked by tanks and outflanked from the south, a portion of the battalion retired to a position north-west of the houses, from which it was able to command the exits, and, assisted by a few Australians, it remained there for the rest of the day.

The 2/Devonshire, the counter-attack battalion waiting south of Villers Bretonneux, had no news of the situation before four tanks (*Group II.*) struck its two left companies scattering them and opening the way for infantry of the *4th Guard Division* to enter Bois d'Aquenne. The two right companies and those of the 1/Worcestershire next to them in the switch line fired from the rear of the trench to prevent

¹ Volckheim, p. 111.

² Of *Group I.*, one tank accompanied the infantry into Villers Bretonneux, two worked round the eastern and north-eastern outskirts and dealt with machine guns. All three returned to their assembly place at midday.

Of *Group II.*, two tanks went on to Bois d'Aquenne and assisted the infantry to enter it ; the third reached the railway station, had engine trouble and fell into a fresh shell hole of large size (it was found in a small chalk pit and salvaged by the French) ; No. 4 went on to Bois d'Aquenne. Nos. 5 and 6 do not appear to have done much ; the drivers of both were wounded and the engines failed, but they managed to get home slowly. No further action of Nos. 1, 2 and 4 is mentioned, but they were "salved".

³ Many German prisoners captured in the town and during the subsequent counter-attack were found to be suffering from the effects of gas.

the enemy debouching southwards from the wood ; but he then placed machine guns along its edge and continued his advance westwards.

North of Villers Bretonneux the counter-attack battalion, the 2/R. Berkshire, was bent back to form a line facing south-east, so as to oppose any attempt the enemy might make to advance northward from the town.

A gap of about fourteen hundred yards from the left of the 2/Devonshire in the Cachy Switch to the 2/East Lancashire, north-west of Villers Bretonneux, had now been formed in the British front, and through this gap the enemy had penetrated into Bois d'Aquenne. His advance had not been sufficient to involve the loss of any artillery, except six guns of the 290th Brigade R.F.A., covering the 58th Divn, and all those of the 291st Siege Battery, which had been pushed forward among the field batteries. These guns were in position immediately west and north-west of Villers Bretonneux, and were all recovered after the counter-attack. About midday parts of several field batteries were withdrawn a short way, although moved forward again at dusk.

As early as 4 A.M., Major-General Cator had ordered his reserve brigade (less the 6/London, which had been badly gassed a few days before in Villers Bretonneux) to move forward from Cagny to Bois de Gentelles. On their arrival, the 7th and 8/London were sent to relieve the 9th and 12/London of the 175th Bde so that these units might reinforce the 173rd. At 4.15 A.M., the 22/Durham L.I. (Pioneers, 8th Divn) was ordered by Major-General Heneker to the reserve line just north of Bois l'Abbé, where one of its companies already stood ; and at 4.30 A.M. the III. Corps sent the 53rd Bde (18th Divn) to a position of readiness between Glisy and Blangy Tronville. The 1/Sherwood Foresters (24th Bde)—it had only got back to Blangy Tronville on relief at 2 A.M.—was sent forward at 4 A.M. to Bois de Blangy. The Australian reserve brigades, the 13th north of the Somme and the 15th south of it, stood to arms.

At 7.20 A.M. Major-General Heneker heard from an officer in Villers Bretonneux that the Germans had attacked with tanks alongside the railway, and shortly before 8 A.M. stragglers from the trenches brought the same story. At first there was a disposition to treat the matter as alarmist ; but about 8.30 A.M. authentic news that Villers Bretonneux was in the enemy's hands began to reach

divisional and corps headquarters, and very soon after this was confirmed by a definite report. Lieut.-General Butler placed the 54th Bde (18th Divn) at the disposal of the 58th Divn to replace the 174th in divisional reserve, and the 11/Royal Fusiliers went forward to Bois de Gentelles, the 7/Bedfordshire to the south of Cachy, and the two remaining companies of the 6/Northamptonshire to reinforce the rest of the battalion in Cachy Switch.

Major-General Heneker had at hand the four tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion, one male (two 6-pdr. guns) and two female (machine guns only), and, in view of the enemy's use of tanks, his thoughts not unnaturally turned to them. Accordingly he placed them at the disposal of Br.-General Grogan (23rd Bde), who ordered them to help in the defence of Cachy Switch, north-east of Cachy. There they arrived about 9.30 A.M. Soon after, an enemy tank (of *Group II*) appeared and at once knocked out the female tanks, while the male was afterwards hit by artillery fire. The male tank, though one of its guns was disabled by a shell, obtained a hit, and the Germans at once abandoned their machine.¹ Two more enemy tanks appeared, and were engaged. The crew of one got out and ran; the other attempted to approach Cachy, but was met by the concentrated fire of six guns of the 58th Machine-Gun Battalion, and the crew, put out of action by the splash of the bullets, surrendered.²

At 8.40 A.M., two more tanks—one male and one female—of the 1st Tank Battalion were handed over by the III. Corps to Major-General Heneker, and at 9.30 A.M. were ordered to advance north of the railway and in conjunction with a counter-attack by the 1/Sherwood Foresters recapture the town. This battalion, moving south of Bois l'Abbé, turned northwards into Bois d'Auquenne about 12.30 P.M., and, finally reached the Cachy—Fouilloy road, which runs between Bois l'Abbé and Bois d'Auquenne in a fairly deep cutting: there it stopped any further advance of the enemy. This road was the nearest point to Amiens (8 miles) reached by the Germans in 1918.³ The tanks moved north of the wood and could not give any assistance to the

¹ Subsequently this machine reported that it had been attacked by seven British tanks.

² Volckheim states that, in all, one officer and 8 men were killed; 3 officers and 50 men wounded, and only one taken prisoner. He also states that all the abandoned tanks but one were recovered during the night. Schwarte iii., p. 457, correctly says that two were left on the field.

³ The road was the objective of the 4th Guard Division.

Foresters.¹ The male tank, starting from the northernmost corner of Bois l'Abbé, was soon put out of action by a shell ; in the middle of the afternoon the female tank went on alone, and firing with effect on German troops north of Villers Bretonneux, cleared them out of a small copse, thus enabling the 2/East Lancashire to improve its position. At 4 P.M., with its commander and three men wounded, and its machine guns out of action, the tank was withdrawn.

At 10.20 A.M., the seven light tanks of the 3rd Tank Battalion, were in the little wood a mile south of Blangy Tronville. Placed under the 58th Divn, they were ordered to clear up the situation in front of Cachy, where the tank fight was now over. A message dropped from an aeroplane gave the information that two enemy battalions were resting in a hollow in front of Cachy, and that they might be taken unawares if tanks could get there quickly. The tanks moved without delay, came on the two battalions, which belonged to the *77th Reserve Division*, and at once charged in line southwards, then turned round and repeated the process northwards, causing, it was estimated, at least four hundred casualties and dispersing the rest of the Germans. Of the seven, one tank was put out of action by artillery fire, one officer and two men, its whole crew, being killed, and three others were disabled.

Villers Bretonneux had not been recovered, but the 15th Australian Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Elliott), the reserve of the 5th Australian Division, was near Aubigny, less than three miles from the town. This brigade, so long as the Australian Corps occupied the northern part of the 8th Divn sector—that is until the 20th April—had been kept a mile or so north-west of the town, ready to counter-attack, if it were lost. In view of the German attack Br.-General Elliott had already made every preparation to advance and counter-attack, sending out patrols and keeping himself well informed of the situation. Nevertheless, when, about 9 A.M., Major-General Hobbs offered to put the 15th Australian Brigade at his disposal, Major-General Heneker thought it necessary to communicate with the III. Corps, and, at 10 A.M., Lieut.-General Butler declined the offer, saying that the 8th Divn should be quite capable of dealing with the situation.

¹ At 9.30 A.M. the 23rd Bde also was ordered to counter-attack with the tanks, but it had no men available, and the 8th Divn cancelled the order. The counter-order did not reach the tanks, so they went forward alone at 1 P.M.

As soon, however, as General Rawlinson heard of the loss of Villers Bretonneux, he ordered the nearest reserve brigade of the Australian Corps—the 18th (Br.-General T. W. Glasgow), of the 4th Australian Division, in Army reserve, billeted at Querrieu, Pont Noyelles and Daours, (north of the Somme, 3 to 6 miles by road from Villers Bretonneux)—to march south to the III. Corps “to assist in the recapture of Villers Bretonneux, which was imperative for the safety of Amiens”. The brigade was first directed to the Somme opposite Glisy, the headquarters of the 8th Divn; but this destination was almost immediately changed to Blangy Tronville, as this route was shorter. The order arrived at 9.40 A.M., packs and blankets were stored, and the brigade marched at 11.15 A.M. It was concentrated at Bois de Blangy by 4 P.M., one battalion (49th) being then sent to strengthen the garrison of the reserve line, north of Bois l’Abbé, and to replace the 22/Durham L.I., which had been ordered forward.

The 55th Bde (18th Divn), in Fourth (Fifth) Army reserve ten miles west of Amiens, was also placed at the disposal of the III. Corps, and at 10 A.M. it moved by march and bus to St. Fuscien (three miles west of Boves), where it began to arrive at 4 P.M.

No further order for a counter-attack was issued by the 8th Divn until 11 A.M., when the 25th Bde was instructed to get ready to advance against the northern side of Villers Bretonneux. But, after consulting battalion commanders, Br.-General Coffin reported that the enemy’s machine guns were now so strongly established that there appeared small hope of success without thorough artillery preparation; so the order was cancelled. Meanwhile General Rawlinson had continued to insist on the recapture of the town as quickly as possible. He suggested simultaneous attacks from north and south, and by his direction the III. Corps, at 11.30 A.M., instructed Major-General Heneker, who was to be in charge of the operation, to get in touch with the 5th Australian Division for the purpose of arranging a combined movement, proposing 2 P.M. as the hour. Major-General Hobbs once more offered the 15th Australian Brigade, still in reserve at Aubigny, or the two reserve battalions of the 14th Australian Brigade, which were even closer, for this purpose. Major-General Heneker, supported by the opinion of Br.-General Coffin, replied that he considered an attack in daylight across the open plateau, a perfect field for machine-gun fire, could not succeed.

He therefore put forward to the III. Corps a plan for an organized counter-attack by moonlight, employing two brigades to advance one on either side of Villers Bretonneux, and pinch it out.

This scheme was approved by Lieut.-General Butler and General Rawlinson. The latter described on the telephone exactly how he wished the counter-attack to be made, and sent Lieut.-Colonel E. H. L. Beddington of his General Staff (transferred from the Fifth Army General Staff) to see that his wishes were carried out. This officer remained at 8th Divn headquarters until the attack had been launched and was in a fair way to succeed.¹ General Debeney, on being informed of the plan, promised co-operation if the attack were postponed until the next day ; but General Rawlinson considered it of supreme importance that the counter-attack should take place at the earliest possible moment, before the Germans had settled down, and urged that once they had consolidated their gains only a large force, which he had not got, could turn them out. General Debeney declined to do more than to order forward the Moroccan Division (General Daugan) from his reserve north of the Luce. About 4 P.M. this division was assembling north-west of Bois de Gentelles behind the British right, and at night it occupied the reserve line between Gentelles and Bois l'Abbé, thus freeing some of the reserve of the 58th Divn.

When, at 12.30 P.M., Sir Douglas Haig arrived at Fourth Army headquarters, General Debeney's attitude was explained to him. He directed that a telephone message should be sent to Lieut.-General Du Cane, his representative with General Foch, urging the latter to direct the Moroccan Division to co-operate with the troops of the Fourth Army

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i), p. 490, seems to suggest that the counter-attack was ordered by General Rawlinson in consequence of the "intervention" of General Foch, in a written message, untimed, but which, from Foch's "journal de marche", seems to have been penned by him "vers midi". It was carried by Lieut.-General Du Cane who did not arrive until nearly 8 p.m. The message ran : "L'importance de Villers Bretonneux "qui domine Amiens ne peut échapper au général Rawlinson. L'ayant "perdu, il est difficile d'admettre qu'il ne fasse pas *tout son possible* "pour le reprendre, qu'il n'engage pas de fortes réserves d'armée pour le "reprendre, qu'il ne prépare pas, sans aucun retard, une *puissante* "contre-attaque comme celle que le général Debeney a montée dès ce "matin 10 heures à Rumigny [headquarters French XXXI. Corps], et à "Dury [headquarters, III. Corps], d'accord avec le général Butler, et le "général commandant le 31 C.A. français, et la D.I. marocaine. F. Foch."

There was no French counter-attack on the 24th or 25th, as the text shows.

to retake Villers Bretonneux by counter-attack, instead of leaving it in reserve behind the British right. The Commander-in-Chief then went on to visit III. Corps headquarters at Dury (3 miles south of Amiens). On his return to Flixecourt he found there Lieut.-General Du Cane who had just delivered General Foch's written message. He made it clear that General Foch had apparently misunderstood the telephoned message and was under the impression that General Debeney was urging the Fourth Army to counter-attack, but that it would not do so. The reverse was, indeed, the case. Sir D. Haig therefore directed his representative to ask the Generalissimo :

(1) To order the Moroccan Division to attack with the British as soon as possible ;

(2) To move up reserves north of the Somme to support the Australian Corps between the Somme and Albert, as the two reserve brigades of the latter had been sent to the III. Corps to take part in the counter-attack ;

(3) To relieve the three divisions (8th, 18th and 58th) of the III. Corps as soon as possible, because they had been in the battle ever since it began and were getting used up and now consisted mostly of young drafts.

He wrote later to General Foch to the same effect, and with the desired result that General Debeney was ordered to co-operate on the 25th.

Meantime General Rawlinson at 3.10 P.M. had placed the 5th Australian Division temporarily under the III. Corps, so that Lieut.-General Butler had at his disposal for the counter-attack both the 13th and 15th Australian Brigades—the latter well acquainted with the ground, the former new to it—as well as any of his own troops which might be available. At 5.30 P.M., after conferences at 8th Divn headquarters at Glisy, and considerable discussion—for views differed and information was vague—the G.O.C. 8th Divn, who had been formally placed in command of all the troops taking part in the counter-attack, issued his written orders with the object of re-establishing the line lost in the morning.

The force detailed consisted of three brigades of three different divisions, without the communication resources or the cohesion of the troops of an organized division.

The 15th Australian Brigade was to assemble about that part of the Cachy—Fouilloy road north of the railway and advance south-east past the north of Villers Bretonneux.

The 13th Australian Brigade was to assemble north of

Cachy and attack eastwards, south of the town, to reach the front east of the Monument at a point 600 yards north of the railway, where it would meet the 15th Australian Brigade.

The 54th Bde to assemble east of Cachy and south of the 13th Australian Brigade, and also advance eastwards.

Two battalions (2/Northamptonshire and 22/Durham L.I.), attached to the 13th and 15th Australian Brigades respectively, were to "mop up" Villers Bretonneux, assisted by the three tanks at the disposal of the 8th Divn, the remaining tanks being left with the 58th Divn.

The hour suggested had been originally 8 P.M., but it was finally fixed for 10 P.M. No preliminary bombardment or creeping barrage was to be fired, as the former would give warning of attack, and it was considered that there was not sufficient time to organize an accurate creeping barrage; all available artillery was therefore concentrated on a standing barrage, co-ordinated by the G.O.C. III. Corps Heavy Artillery, with well defined targets. It was ordered to fire from 10 to 11 P.M. on Villers Bretonneux, the railway south of the town, the Monument and the eastern part of Bois de Hangard; at 11 P.M. the heavy batteries were to lift to a protective barrage five hundred yards beyond the objective, and the field artillery to a similar barrage, three hundred yards beyond it.

Thus the counter-attack was neither immediate nor deliberately prepared by reconnaissance and artillery bombardment.

There was a full moon, but, as the night wore on, it was constantly obscured by clouds, and some of the troops had considerable difficulty in finding their way across country to their rendezvous. Later, the glare of burning buildings in Villers Bretonneux gave assistance as regards keeping direction.

The counter-attack resulted in Villers Bretonneux and Bois d'Aquenne being almost encircled and most of the ground lost in the northern half of the battlefield regained, although the old front line was nowhere reached. The 54th Bde (actually made up of the 9/London of the 175th Bde, the 7/R. West Kent of the 53rd, and its own 7/Bedfordshire) moved forward in line at 10 P.M. At that moment the artillery opened fire as arranged, and the moon began to cloud over. Touch was soon lost between the battalions. Some of the 9/London reached Bois de Hangard and took some prisoners, but were unable to make good their hold on it, and the battalion fell back to the starting line.

The 7/R. West Kent was soon met by heavy machine-gun fire from shell holes, and finally dug in about half-way to the objective. In covering the first thousand of the eighteen hundred yards it had to traverse the 7/Bedfordshire met only slight opposition, and crossed the Bois de Hangard—Villers Bretonneux road, due south of the centre of the town. Then it came under heavy artillery fire from the right and fell back about five hundred yards behind the road, taking position in shell holes only to find that the enemy was in other shell holes around it. But the Bedfordshire men, although summoned by the Germans to surrender, were now in touch with the 13th Australian Brigade, and hung on until relieved on the night of the 25th/26th.

The parties sent to tape the starting line of the 13th Australian Brigade between Cachy and Bois l'Abbé were fired on from Bois d'Aquenne, which it was thought had been cleared by the 1/Sherwood Foresters. Eventually they had to mark the line three hundred yards west of the position intended. The advance was begun at 10.10 P.M., the 52nd Battalion on the right, 51st on the left and the 50th in support, the 49th being left behind in the reserve line. The wire in front of Cachy Switch, which ran diagonally across the front, caused delay to both front-line battalions, and the struggles of the men at one place tightened the strands round the men stepping over it at others. This obstacle being surmounted, the 52nd came across some of the 2/Devonshire (23rd Bde) and 1/Worcestershire (24th Bde), still holding out in a trench, and were on the point of attacking them. They soon encountered some opposition, and German flares were seen calling for artillery help all along the front; but, after a charge and some sharp fighting with the bayonet, resistance was overcome, and the battalion reached its objective. Subsequently, in consequence of the Bedfordshire having withdrawn as already related, the 52nd, whose left flank was also exposed, was brought back to gain contact with the Bedfordshire. The 51st had a harder task, its left being enfiladed from the moment of starting by a number of machine guns on the southern side of Bois d'Aquenne. A platoon was sent into the wood to deal with these by bomb and bayonet, and captured nine of them, one after another;¹ but in spite of the fire from Bois d'Aquenne, which was only gradually extinguished, the advance of the main body continued.

¹ Lieut. C. W. K. Sadlier, 51st Battalion, who was in command and twice wounded, was awarded the V.C.

But whilst scrambling through the wire of Cachy Switch, the 51st was again enfiladed, this time by machine guns on the Cachy—Villers Bretonneux road, and thereby suffered considerable loss. The nearest gun was captured and the support company tried to reach the others, but without success ; so two Vickers guns were left to watch them, and the advance again proceeded. Astonished perhaps by the Australians brushing past the machine guns, a panic now seized the Germans opposed to the 51st ;¹ but on reaching the Bois de Hangard—Villers Bretonneux road, the opposition on the left around the Monument, where enemy parties had rallied, and from the railway embankment on the south edge of Villers Bretonneux, became very strong. German infantrymen who were encountered wandering aimlessly about were killed or captured ; but others advanced from the town to attack the 51st in flank, until a company of the 50th came up and drove them back. One party of the 51st pushed forward between the Monument and the town, and others reached the flank of the 52nd south of the Monument. Eventually, about 1 A.M., the 51st Battalion was ordered to fall back and align itself on the 52nd. The northern flank, being still open and exposed to fire from a tall house several hundred yards away, was protected by a small detachment, and the advanced parties were gradually brought in. The 18th Brigade was not on its objective, but was still in a position to ensure “pinching out” Villers Bretonneux should the 15th Brigade be successful.

The forming-up place of the 15th Australian Brigade was two miles from its position at Aubigny, on the Cachy—Fouilloy road, north of the railway ; but, owing to the commanding officers being late in returning from a very necessary last conference, the battalions were behind time in starting, and then were further delayed by the darkness and detours to avoid gas lying in depressions : one of the companies destined for the attack actually lost its way. The necessary rearrangements were made as quickly as was possible in the dark, but it was nearly midnight, two hours behind time, before the 15th Brigade advanced ; this explains why German accounts speak of its attack as a second and separate affair. The 59th and 60th Battalions were in front, with two companies of the latter and the 57th behind the right flank. Two companies of the 57th were to extend the right when the objective was reached ; the other two were to halt at the proper moment and face to the

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

rear and flank so as to protect the advance from interference from the town, and subsequently, if necessary, to clear the eastern half of it. Br.-General Elliott seems to have mistrusted the information given to him as to the position of the front line which was to be recaptured: his orders made the Villers Bretonneux—Hamelet road the first objective, and the Villers Bretonneux—Hamel road the second, with the addition that it might “not be necessary to proceed” entirely to the second objective, as our old front line is not “so far forward”. Actually, since the road in question ran diagonally north-eastwards whilst the old line went due northwards, the latter lay about a thousand yards east of the road in question on the right, at the Roman road, and crossed it on the left.

The first objective, more than a mile away, was reached without interference; but beyond it the Germans, startled by the scouts, showed signs of life. The officer leading the 59th at once gave the command, “Charge”; this was taken up by the whole line and the Australians started forward to close with the enemy in one great rush, yelling and cheering. They were guided by the German flares sent up to call for a barrage and by the glare from some of the houses at the north-eastern corner of Villers Bretonneux which were on fire. Carrying all before them and brushing past the northern outskirts of Villers Bretonneux, from which machine guns were shooting furiously but high and wild, they broke the German line, and reached the Hamel road with the loss of no more than 150 men. There, about 1.30 A.M., they halted, and some discussion followed as to where the old front trench was. After fifteen minutes, the two allotted companies of the 57th went on nearly half-a-mile to establish the right flank to the south of the Roman road and to try and connect with the 13th Brigade, whose flank was, however, a mile to the westward. They reached the neighbourhood of the old British front, but could find nothing of the 13th, and, in view of the danger of the exposed flank, their commander brought them back and a decision was made that the 15th Brigade should remain where it was. A flank was bent round to face the town and guard the right. On the northern flank touch was not established with the 14th Australian Brigade, and at this point a gap existed in the line until the 27th.

From the reports arriving at Glisy it became clear that the Germans were still in strength in Villers Bretonneux, between the Australian brigades. The two battalions

detailed to " mop up " the town had found the task too much for them. The 2/Northamptonshire following behind the left flank of the 13th Australian Brigade suffered many casualties in crossing the wire of Cachy Switch ; it should then have moved north-eastwards against the town, but the Germans were found fully on the alert, lining the railway embankment and the eastern edge of Bois d'Aquenne, and Lieut.-Colonel S. G. Latham and his adjutant were wounded, the former mortally. After two attempts therefore, the Northamptonshire got touch again with the 13th Australian Brigade and took position to lengthen the defensive flank facing north already formed on the left.

The 22/Durham L.I. (Pioneers), approaching Villers Bretonneux from the west, north of the Roman road, having started late like the 15th Australian Brigade, found the enemy ready, and after making two attempts, in the face of intense fire, ceased to continue its task of clearing the northern outskirts.

Although the counter-attack had failed to reach the old front line, it had advanced far enough to place in jeopardy the communications of the Germans in Villers Bretonneux and Bois d'Aquenne, where parts of the 228th *Division* had reinforced the 4th *Guard Division*. Owing to the gap of fifteen hundred yards which stretched between the left of the 13th and the right of the 15th Australian Brigades, many Germans who would otherwise have been captured managed to escape down the railway cutting. It was not until 6 A.M. on the 25th that orders were sent to turn all available heavy guns on to this gap. Had the 15th started at the time ordered, and had it been given the objective laid down by the III. Corps, it has been argued that the task of the 13th and the " moppers-up " might have been rendered easier, the objectives reached by both brigades, and the enemy in Villers Bretonneux cut off ; but as the two brigades attacked separately in the dark, and it is doubtful whether the 13th Brigade could have gone farther than it did, no positive conclusion is possible.

So much having been accomplished, Major-General Heneker was encouraged in his efforts to complete the task of regaining the old line. At 4 A.M. on the 25th, the remnants of the 23rd Bde, 440 strong, collected in Bois l'Abbé where the reserve line crossed the Roman road, were sent forward along the road to initiate a movement to clear Bois d'Aquenne and to fill the gap in the line west of Villers Bretonneux. At this hour it was still night and

the darkness was intensified by the mist which formed just as it had done on the previous morning. The brigade soon came under fire, but gained touch with the 22/Durham L.I. on the left. The 2/West Yorkshire, or rather what remained of it, was then detached to work through Bois d'Aquenne from the south and so turn the enemy's flank, assisted by three tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion. The result of this manœuvre was that, after a fight lasting about ninety minutes, the Germans were turned out of the wood, leaving 70 unwounded prisoners, 25 machine guns and some heavy trench mortars; whilst the fugitives, before they could reach Villers Bretonneux, came under fire of the 2/Northamptonshire (24th Bde, "moppers up"), on the left of the 13th Australian Brigade, south-west of the town. The 23rd Bde then dug in east of Bois d'Aquenne.

The commanding officer of the 2/Northamptonshire, Major H. T. Forster, after consultation with the 51st Australian Battalion, now decided on an attempt to cut off the Germans in the town by securing the railway station. Actually operations still to be related had already cleared them from all except the south-eastern outskirts. To avoid enfilade fire from the Monument, he took the battalion, in one rush of 150 yards, at the cost of only twelve of the slowest runners, into some dead ground immediately south of the town, and thence sent out parties which gradually cleared the enemy from the neighbourhood of the station.

After daybreak the 22/Durham L.I. had resumed its attempt to "mop up" the northern part of the town from the west, but the task had already been begun by the 2/R. Berkshire (25th Bde), and two companies of the 57th Australian Battalion, from the north, which entered Villers Bretonneux at dawn. The three forces met in the centre of the town, having captured 472 prisoners and 60 machine guns. The two Australian companies went on to take position east of the place; the Berkshire were withdrawn; and the clearing up of Villers Bretonneux was completed by the Durhams and Northamptonshire. At night the gap still remaining in the south-eastern outskirts was temporarily guarded by the 25th Bde whilst the Australians were closing it.

As soon as the northern part of Villers Bretonneux was cleared, the 15th Australian Brigade extended its right southward, thereby securing the position on the Villers Bretonneux—Hamel road ordered by the brigadier. It

only remained for the 13th to join up with it, and at 9.55 A.M. Br.-General Glasgow sent orders to his reserve, the 50th Battalion, to advance and fill the gap. But the enemy was still in possession of the ground about the Monument; machine-gun fire over the plateau rendered movement there impossible by daylight in close proximity to the enemy, and the battalion commander suggested that the operation should be postponed until night.

During the afternoon, some uncertainty prevailed as to the exact position of the front posts of the 54th Bde near Bois de Hangard. To clear up the situation three whippets of the 3rd Tank Brigade were sent forward, and found a trench full of Germans west of the wood. They did great execution amongst them, driving them out of a gap between the 9/London and 7/R. West Kent, which was then occupied. Opposite Cachy, however, part of the German front line still lay west of the Villers Bretonneux—Domart road, though this was not at the time realized by the 8th Divn and higher British commanders.

At 7 P.M. the Germans carried out a bombardment of the whole front line of attack, which lasted an hour, but no infantry attack followed.¹ Later two companies of the 49th Australian Battalion were sent up to assist the 50th, and by 3.45 A.M. on the 26th the gap between the 13th and 15th Australian Brigades was filled without difficulty.

Thus, as a result of General Rawlinson's grasp of the situation and resolution to act even without French assistance, the enemy had been deprived of a considerable portion of his gains of the morning of the 24th. He had been cleared out of Villers Bretonneux, although the original British front had not been quite recovered; and he had been foiled in his object of diverting attention before the attack on Kemmel took place and of getting nearer to Amiens. Occasional long-range shots were already falling near the railway yards, and any further advance on the enemy's part would bring him dangerously near the city. The Fourth Army had no reserves left and, as fighting was still in progress on the Lys, there was no prospect of receiving British reinforcements. The French, however, had the Moroccan Division in reserve and close at hand; and General Foch, realizing the situation, had now given General Debeney a distinct order to co-operate. On the morning of the 25th, a conference on the subject took place

¹ Counter-attacks had been ordered earlier in the day but had been postponed. See Note at end of Chapter.

between Generals Rawlinson and Debeney. The following action was decided upon :

- (1) The Moroccan Division, on the 26th, to attack and establish the line from the northern edge of Bois de Hangard to the Monument.¹
- (2) The 58th Divn to co-operate by attacking Bois de Hangard.
- (3) The 8th Divn (with the 13th Australian Brigade still under it) to join up with the left of the Moroccans.
- (4) The Australian Corps to take over the line of the III. Corps as far south as the Monument on the 26th, and the Moroccan Division to relieve all troops of the III. Corps on the night of the 26th/27th.
- (5) The reserve brigade (55th) of the 18th Divn to be attached to the Australian Corps on the 26th ; the remainder of the III. Corps, after relief, to move into a back area.

Orders in this sense were issued by the III. Corps at 8.10 P.M. Zero hour was fixed at 5.15 A.M., and the attack was to be made under a creeping barrage without preliminary bombardment. The French 181st Divn, on the right, was to retake Hangard ; two battalions of the 18th Divn (7/Queen's and 10/Essex), acting under French orders, were to regain the original line in the middle of Bois de Hangard ; the Moroccan Division—after relieving the 7/R. West Kent, 7/Bedfordshire and 52nd and 51st Australian Battalions on the night of the 25th/26th—on the left of the British, was to attack, supported by British tanks, between the wood and the Monument ; the 50th Australian Battalion, north of it, was to assist.

The attack made in broad daylight, was a dismal failure, except that the two British battalions retook part of Bois de Hangard. The 181st Divn could not recapture Hangard ; the Moroccan Division, starting from behind the British outpost line near Cachy in very thick formation, encountered the enemy several hundred yards farther west than was expected from the information given to it and lost all the advantage of its barrage ; thus handicapped it suffered heavy losses. Counter-attacked by part of the *19th Division*, which was in the act of relieving the *77th Reserve Division*, the Moroccans fell back to the line previously held by the foremost German elements. The tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion were fortunately able to

¹ The Moroccan Division contained as infantry a regiment of zouaves, one of the Foreign Legion and two of native tirailleurs.

check the counter-attack by inflicting heavy losses on the Germans. The Moroccan left battalion which, owing to the difficulties of the Australians in guiding it, was late in coming up, did not attempt to attack when it found that the 50th Australian Battalion next to it, which had moved forward punctually, was stopped by machine-gun fire from the Monument. The Moroccan Division was reported to have lost 70 officers and 3,400 other ranks.

The III. Corps then ordered the 8th Divn to retake the Monument position, in view of its importance to the enemy ; but the battalions were reported to be too weak after their heavy casualties to undertake the operation, and it was cancelled.

In the small hours of the 27th, the gap which had existed since the 25th between the 15th and 14th Australian Brigades was straightened out by a small but expensive operation of the 60th Battalion, costing ninety men. It was executed with the help of trench mortars although without that of artillery. The enemy's counter-attack was stopped by artillery fire alone.¹

At 9 P.M. on the 26th, Lieut.-General Butler (III. Corps), by arrangement, handed over his front as far north as the right of the 13th Australian Brigade to General Toulorge (French XXXI. Corps). Thus the Monument

¹ The gross casualties, including gas casualties, 5th-27th April (those for the battle 24th-27th are not separately available) had been :

	Officers	Other Ranks
8th Divn	133	3,420
18th „	117	2,329
58th „	153	3,377
	<u>403</u>	<u>9,126</u>

The Australian losses, in the case of the 5th Division including gas casualties, were :

	Officers	Other Ranks	
5th Division	50	1,284	} Total
13th Brigade	46	993	
	<u>100</u>		
Artillery, &c.			2,473

The Germans claim 2,400 prisoners.

The losses of the 5 German divisions engaged are not available, except for the 77th Reserve Division given in "Res. Regt. No. 257" as 2,945. The history of the 4th Guard Division, pp. 141-2, mentions that in the early part of May it received reinforcements from the Homeland, and later in the month 1,500 more from the Eastern theatre. "Guard Grenadier Regt. "No. 5" gives casualties 21st-27th April as 722 ; "Foot Guard Regt. "No. 5", 22nd-27th, as 616. Those of the 228th Division, which was turned out of Villers Bretonneux, were probably more, and those of the others less. Several hundred prisoners were taken in Villers Bretonneux alone.

(to be held by the British)—Cachy—Gentelles—Boves became the international boundary ; but the 7/Queen's and 10/Essex, in Bois de Hangard, remained in line under the Moroccan Division until the night of the 27th/28th. To secure the junction of the two Armies, General Fayolle moved up the 37th and 165th Divisions behind it. At noon on the 27th, the remainder of the III. Corps front was handed over to the Australian Corps, and the III. Corps (its artillery remaining in action) went out to rest, and both sides in front of Amiens settled down to a period of comparative quiet.¹

On the 28th April, General Foch enquired whether the Fourth Army was strong enough to hold Villers Bretonneux without assistance from the French, for, should this be the case, he would move some of his reserves northward, as had been his original intention. In reply, he was informed that the Fourth Army was sufficiently strong for the purpose, provided the French lost no ground on its right : they should retake Hangard and Bois de Hangard : the weakness of the defence of the Fourth Army always lay in the fact that its flank was exposed by the withdrawal of the French ; it would be advisable for the French to keep their reserves handy until, in three or four days' time, an Australian division could be placed in the Somme valley.

Sketch
11.

Sir Douglas Haig himself was of opinion that, had the French persisted between the 5th and 25th April and retaken the high ground south of Hangard in the angle between the Avre and Luce, marked by Moreuil—Thennes—Demuin, and had thus straightened out the line, the attack on Villers Bretonneux would not have taken place, for it was the loss of this ground which had uncovered the right flank of the Villers Bretonneux position.

NOTE

THE GERMANS AT VILLERS BRETONNEUX, 24TH-27TH APRIL

Sketch
26.

A document of the German *Second Army*, dated 8th April, states, that in view of the low strength of the divisions and of the tactical situation, an attack on the whole front of the three corps of the left wing (*XIV.*, *XI.*, *LI.*), from Moreuil to the Somme, was not possible. Attacks would therefore be made in echelon from the right as soon as sufficient troops were available and the necessary

¹ The British artillery covering the French, four R.F.A. and two R.G.A. brigades, was withdrawn on the 30th.

preparations had been made. The objective would be the line, north to south, Aubigny—Blangy Tronville—Bois de Gentelles—Fouencamps—Merville (5 miles south of Fouencamps). This scheme was reduced in scope on the 14th, and the objectives became north edge of Villers Bretonneux—west edge of Cachy—mouth of the Luce. The *XXIII. Reserve Corps*, north of the Somme, was to give assistance with its artillery and carry out a big raid about an hour before the assault. Sketch 26.

This plan seems to have been again cut down. The attack was made by the *XIV.* and *XI. Corps*, consisting of the *228th, 4th Guard, 77th Reserve* and *208th Divisions*, with the *19th* and *9th Bavarian Reserve Divisions* in reserve. The object of the attack was "to hold the enemy forces on this front and thus assist further German attacks at another place. The secondary object was to advance the line so as to permit of a still more effective artillery attack on the great railway establishments at Amiens, and thus prevent the shifting of enemy forces."¹ The objective was "the line Foulloy (on the Somme)—Gentelles—Hangard". Fifteen tanks were to be employed, which were "to hasten well ahead of the infantry".

The attack proceeded well at first, the *XIV. Corps* stormed Villers Bretonneux and got into the wood beyond it, and the *XI. Corps* reached the eastern edge of Cachy and captured Hangard. But as early as noon it was driven back a little way by a British counter-attack (54th Bde) at the junction with the *XIV. Corps*, so that "a British nest" arose south of Villers Bretonneux, which could not be overcome by the exhausted troops. At 9 P.M. a strong enemy counter-attack from Cachy struck the troops south of Villers Bretonneux and "occasioned a panic which could not be overcome in time, as the reserves failed to come up quickly enough". The inner flanks of both corps fell back to the eastern edge of Villers Bretonneux.

The German accounts of the loss of Villers Bretonneux are somewhat confused, as is perhaps natural. No report of the British counter-attacks appears to have reached *XIV. Corps* headquarters from the *4th Guard Division* until 2.30 A.M. on the 25th, and the blame for the retirement was placed on the flank troops of the *77th Reserve Division* of the next corps.

The inner flanks of the *XIV.* and *XI. Corps* were then reinforced. The *228th Division* still claimed to be holding Villers Bretonneux, and it was not until morning that the Germans discovered that the 15th Australian Brigade had in its counter-attack reached the eastern exit of the town.

At 4.45 A.M. on the 25th the *4th Guard Division* was ordered to counter-attack south of Villers Bretonneux, with the *77th Reserve Division*, reinforced by the *74th Regiment* of the *19th Division* (reserve of the *XI. Corps*) and two battalions of the *1st Grenadier Regiment* (reserve of the *1st Division*, which had been sent to Marcelcave) to restore the line gained on the 24th. The attack was to take place at 7 A.M. The *78th Regiment (19th Division)* reinforced the *77th Reserve Division* north of Bois de Hangard.

At 6 A.M. the *4th Guard Division* still claimed to be in Bois

¹ "Die 4 Garde Infanterie Division", pp. 136-7. Ludendorff, p. 600, says the attack was made "to improve the *Second Army's* position".

d'Aquenne, and the *48th Regiment* claimed to be in Villers Bretonneux at 7 A.M. The confusion in the German lines was considerable, and it is evident that no one knew where the troops really were, nor how to get orders to them. The German counter-attack ordered for 7 A.M. had first to be postponed till 8.30, then till 9 A.M., and was finally abandoned, as sufficient fresh troops could not be brought up in time.

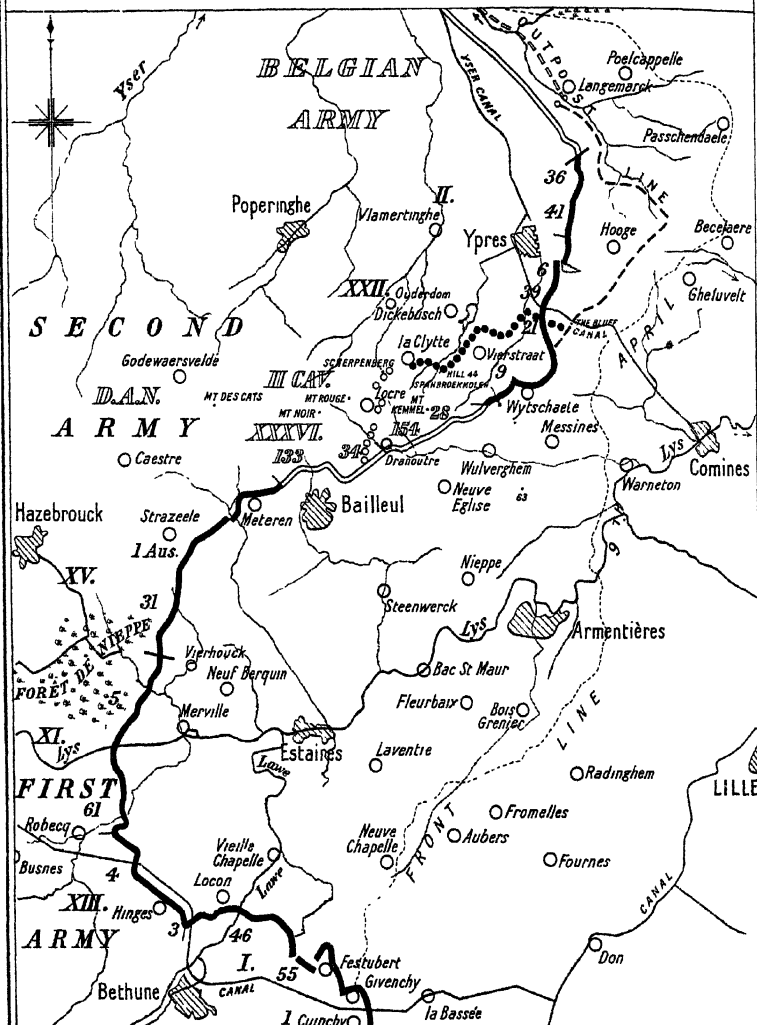
After the battle recrimination went on for a long time between the *XI.* and *XIV. Corps* as to which division had been responsible for the retreat on the night of the 24th/25th. The *XIV. Corps* said it was caused by the retirement of the *77th Reserve Division* (in face of the 18th Australian Brigade attack); the *XI. Corps* maintained that the loss of Villers Bretonneux was due to the counter-attack which came from the depression west of Hill 104 against the left wing of the *243rd Division* and right wing of the *228th Division* (the 15th Australian Brigade). As a matter of fact, both were right.

"Simultaneously with the attack north of the Luce [on the "24th], a small German operation was carried out at the Moreuil "bridgehead, which had as its objective the heights north-west of "Castel [French area]. It not only brought the desired gain of "ground, but numerous prisoners."¹

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 490, speaks of German attacks at three places (1) at Hangard, from which village the French were driven, so that at night "the line was 150 metres from the western border of the church"; (2) near the mill of Thennes, "where the enemy completely failed"; and (3) near Moreuil, as mentioned above, "where the left of the 64th Division "[next to the 181st at Hangard] was driven from the neighbourhood of "Castel to very near Hailles".

Sketch 27.

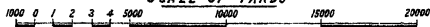
THE LYS, 25TH APRIL.



REFERENCE

Line 25th April British French
 Army boundaries Corps boundaries British French

SCALE OF YARDS



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

CHAPTER XXII

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

25TH APRIL 1918

THE SECOND BATTLE OF KEMMEL

(Map 25¹; Sketches 27, 28)

IN the north, the 25th April was marked by the renewal of the German offensive in the Bailleul—Ypres area, and the capture, from the French, of Mount Kemmel, and consequently of a sector around that hill; but it also saw the defeat of the German plan to push through towards Poperinghe and cut off all the Allied troops in and north of Ypres.²

A thick mist formed during the night; at 5 A.M. visibility was not more than fifty yards; by 6.45 A.M. it was recorded to be two hundred yards, and airmen who came down to a hundred feet from the ground could distinguish nothing. Then visibility slowly improved, but low clouds remained; in the afternoon there was a drizzle of rain, and from 2 to 4 P.M., a thunderstorm.

The actual front of attack extended from Haegedoorne, two thousand yards north-east of the centre of Bailleul, to the Ypres—Comines canal, near The Bluff. This was an international front, the right being held by three divisions of the D.A.N. (General de Mitry), the 34th, 154th and 28th—thus the attack excluded the 133rd Divn, on the extreme right next to the 1st Australian Division; the 39th Division and three cavalry divisions were in reserve.³ The left

¹ See also Map 2 (1 : 40,000 layered map of Ypres) in "1914" Vol. II.

² See Note at end of Chapter.

³ Each division had two infantry regiments (of three battalions each, the equivalent of a British infantry brigade) in the front position, and one in the second and reserve positions. The third regiment of the 133rd Divn was the 15th Group of Chasseurs à pied (see Map 25). The artillery support consisted of 18 groups of field artillery and 7 groups of heavy artillery (4 of which had only come into position during the night of the

was held by the British XXII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley, consisting of the 9th and 21st Dns, with the 39th Dn Composite Brigade, under the latter); and by the II. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. Jacob, comprising the 6th, 41st and 36th Divns). Both infantry and artillery were distributed in depth. Behind the front a number of tired divisions were spread out also in depth: east of Poperinghe, the 30th, 49th and 25th, and west of that town, the 34th and 19th.¹ Occupying the actual front of attack were six French regiments, of three battalions each, on a 9,000 yards' front, and five (very weak), British brigades, of three battalions each, on a 7,000 yards' front.

Map 25.
Sketch
28.

It so happened that the front taken over by the D.A.N. lay entirely on the forward slopes of Mount Kemmel and of the ridges on either side of it, but at the point of junction with the British, at Lagache Farm, the front crossed over

24th/25th); also the British 21st Dn artillery (Br.-General H. W. Newcome), behind the 133rd Divn; two Army Brigades R.F.A. (XI. and XXXVIII.) behind the 154th Division; the 19th Dn artillery (Br.-General W. P. Monkhouse) and the 162nd Brigade R.F.A. of the 33rd Divn, behind the 28th Division; and four British heavy brigades (II., XII., XXXVI. Australian and XLI.) of the IX. Corps heavy artillery (Br.-General G. B. Mackenzie). The IX. Brigade R.A.F. had also remained with the French, as only six observation flights of French aeroplanes had arrived.

¹ The XXII. Corps front was divided into sectors, under the 9th and 21st Dns, regardless of the troops in them, for, in order to ensure rapid relief, Lieut.-General Godley deliberately adopted the policy of relief by small detachments, the 30th Dn being wholly used for this purpose. The 9th Dn (Major-General H. H. Tudor) had under it the 27th Be and 146th Bde in front line, with the S. African Be (now a composite battalion) back at Poperinghe; it was supported by its own artillery (Br.-General A. R. Wainwright) and the 147th Brigade R.F.A. of the 30th Dn.

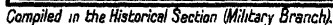
The 21st Dn (Major-General D. G. M. Campbell) had the 64th and 26th Bes in the front position, with the 62nd back at Ouderdom; it was supported by the 49th Divn artillery (Br.-General A. B. Forman), with the 149th Brigade R.F.A. (30th Dn) and the 156th Brigade R.F.A. (33rd Divn). This artillery also covered the 39th Dn Composite Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Hubback).

The 6th Divn had its own artillery (Br.-General E. F. Delaforce), the 41st Divn, that of the 29th (Br.-General R. M. Johnson), plus the XLIX. Army Brigade R.F.A. The 36th Divn had its own artillery (Br.-General H. J. Brock). "A Field Artillery Group in Battle", by Colonel W. H. F. Weber, of this division, gives a good idea of the difficulties and activities of the field artillery in this period.

The XXII. Corps heavy artillery (Br.-General A. S. Jenour, five brigades with 9.2-inch and 8-inch howitzers attached to them) was divided between the two divisions in front line; the II. Corps heavy artillery (Br.-General D. F. H. Logan, also five brigades with 18 long-range and super-heavy batteries) covered part of the Belgian as well as the corps front.

The bulk of the guns were in "silent" positions, that is, did not fire unless a serious enemy attack took place; the rest, nearer the front, used different detachments for night and day work.

KEMMEL, 25TH APRIL, 1918.



Scale of Yards.

Scale of values.

1000	0	1000	2000	3000	4000	5000
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Crown Copyright Reserved

to the reverse slope of the Ypres ridge and continued on this until past Hooze. From Dome House (2,500 yards north of Wytschaete), the Second Army outpost line was the front line, the line of resistance passing west of Zillebeke Lake to the White Chateau and Wieltje.

Behind the front position were the Kemmel—Vierstraat Line, which, north of the Comines canal, was the line of resistance, and the Scherpenberg—Cheapside Line; from abreast of Dickebusch Lake to the Ypres ramparts and thence along the Yser canal, ran in addition a third, intermediate, line, between the Vierstraat and Cheapside Lines, known as the Voormezele Line.¹ Although some of the rearward lines had fallen into disrepair as the operations had gained new ground during 1917, the defences were all well provided with machine-gun nests and had good dug-outs, particularly the Kemmel sector, on which successive Chief Engineers had exercised their skill since October 1914.

The French had expressed themselves dissatisfied with the British defences when they took them over, particularly objecting that the wire ran in long lines, instead of every post being separately wired; but they had had several days in which to reorganize the front to their liking, and the 456th Field Company R.E. and a pioneer battalion (19/Lancashire Fusiliers) had been left to assist them.²

Behind these main lines, there were, east of the Aa canal (St. Omer—Gravelines), ten back lines in various stages of preparation.

Air reconnaissances during the afternoon and evening of the 23rd failed to discover any important German concentration; but during the evening of the 24th prisoners taken by the French 28th Division stated that an attack with gas would be made at 3 A.M. next morning, and this warning was circulated about midnight to the troops. It did not prevent the 28th Division, during the early part of the night, attempting to push forward its line five hundred to a thousand yards near Lindenhoeck. Only about two hundred yards were gained: there were considerable losses and some disorganization ensued; reserves were thrown in, so that at dawn they were out of their proper place; and the situation had not been remedied before the German attack.

¹ The northern part of this had, in 1915, been called "G.H.Q. No. 1 Line", and the northern part of the Cheapside Line, behind it, "No. 2".

² No map of Kemmel defences is available. The detailed maps showing the machine-gun nests and dug-outs, handed to the French, disappeared, as was discovered on the 26th when the British heavy artillery proposed to shell them.

The forming up of the enemy troops was facilitated, according to the French official account, by the existence of an unswept zone in front of this part of the 28th Division line, as the artillery, not informed that only a small advance had been achieved, continued to drop its barrage half a mile ahead, in front of the line which the 28th Division had been intended to reach. Elsewhere, the artillery executed counter-preparation and counter-battery fire, with long-range harassing fire on the roads, which were also bombed, while Houthulst Forest was gassed by the heavy batteries of the II. Corps, as two pilots of No. 98 Squadron, returning from bombing Gheluwe, had reported the roads congested and partly jammed with mechanical transport.

The XXII. Corps, also, was not entirely ready. At Lieut.-General Godley's suggestion, it had been decided on the 23rd, that the line of resistance should not, as first arranged, be the Vierstraat Line, but that the front position from Lagache Farm, the corps right boundary, to Dome House should be maintained in order not to relax the hold on the Ypres ridge near Wytschaete. From Dome House, the outpost line, as already mentioned, became the front line, and a switch line carried on the line of resistance into the Vierstraat Line near Lock 8, at the elbow of the Comines canal. The curve of the salient thus left in the line of resistance near Wytschaete was to have been retrenched by a line across its base, from Petit Bois, west of Wytschaete, via Grand Bois, north of Wytschaete to "The Mound" near St. Eloi; but this had not been quite completed.

At 2.30 A.M. on the 25th April, the German bombardment began. It was of the same character as that employed on the 21st March and in the later set-piece attacks. During the first stage the Allied batteries and rear areas were smothered with gas (mustard and lacrymatory) and high-explosive shell; this continued without intermission, with special periodic concentrations of fifteen minutes' duration, until at 4.30 A.M. a pause of half an hour occurred. When the bombardment was resumed, the front trenches became the main target, and for about an hour a hail of shells fell on them "far worse than anything ever experienced at Verdun", as Frenchmen declared who had been present. According to British witnesses, practically all the French batteries massed in the deep valley on the north side of the Flanders hills between Mont Rouge and Westoutre, were silenced or neutralized by gas; by 8.30 A.M. hardly one gun per battery remained in action.

The British artillery, being more scattered and the enemy fire "patchy", suffered less, but it incurred heavier losses per battery than on any other day in the war: gas masks had to be worn until 11 A.M.¹

The assault on the French line, held by six infantry regiments, was made at 6 A.M. by three and a half German divisions, the *22nd Reserve*, *4th Bavarian*, *Alpine Corps* and the left of the *56th*; the *Alpine Corps*, burning to atone for its failure against the British 33rd Divn at Bailleul on the 14th April, was allotted Mount Kemmel as its objective.²

The French 28th Division, which was defending Kemmel,³ had the British Kemmel Defence Force, under Lieut.-Colonel H. D. Bousfield, still attached to it; but the greater part of this Force, consisting of the 456th Field Company R.E., the 19/Lancashire Fusiliers (Pioneers) and a composite company of platoons from the 1/5th, 1/6th and 1/7th West Yorkshire, was absent, having been working during the night on a communication trench between Mount Kemmel and the Scherpenberg. The 146th Trench Mortar Battery and one company of the 149th Machine-Gun Battalion were in close support to the front line, which was on the lower slopes of the hill, but their mortars and guns were knocked out during the bombardment.

The German assault on Mount Kemmel, although the men who made it, in addition to their usual equipment, were carrying four days' supplies, overran the French front in the first rush, and by 7.10 A.M. the *Leib Regiment* of the *Alpine Corps*, with the assistance of low-flying aeroplanes, had reached the summit before the French supports had emerged from the tunnelled dug-outs. Within half an hour it was firmly established and had taken 800 prisoners. By 7.40 A.M., the left and supporting regiment (*450th*) of

¹ As the right wing of the German assault was to start 15 minutes before the left, in order to protect the flank of the *Alpine Corps*, the final bombardment on that side lasted only three-quarters of an hour, instead of an hour.

² The *Alpine Corps* (really a division), whose right was directed between Kemmel village and Mount Kemmel, had all three regiments in line, each with one of its three battalions in support. The other divisions had two regiments in front line. The *56th Division*, whose right faced the British line, had a fourth regiment attached to it, and therefore placed one regiment in echelon behind each of its flanks. F.O.A. (vi.) i., p. 497, speaks of the *Alpine Corps* and *22nd Reserve Division* as being fresh; but the former had failed before Bailleul on the 14th, and the latter had also been in the battle since the 14th.

³ Two regiments in front line, and the third behind the hill.

the *56th Division* had captured Kemmel village, taking sixteen hundred prisoners; German patrols arrived among the batteries of the 19th Dn (LXXXVII. and LXXXVIII. Brigades), north of the hill and were engaged hand-to-hand. The guns of these units were temporarily disabled by the removal of sights or breechblocks and the undamaged pieces were got away during the afternoon; but the 162nd Brigade R.F.A. waited until the enemy was within three hundred yards and then withdrew, leaving three guns, which were recovered during the night. Soon streams of French infantry were seen descending the hill and escaping north-westward. The finest observation station on the Flanders front had been lost in little more than an hour. A British officer who was present attributes the loss largely to there being too many men on the hill, the trenches being so full of troops that they suffered heavily from the bombardment, and consequently began to leave the hill before the assault; secondly because there was no defence in depth, the reserves being close up.

Resistance was continued for a time in the machine-gun nests and strongpoints by French and British detachments; also by Colonel Bousfield at his headquarters at the entrance to a tunnel which gave access to the observation posts on the forward slope, until he was ordered by the senior French commander to cease fire. By midday, according to German accounts, opposition had been overcome: according to the French official account, this took place even earlier, at 10.30 A.M.¹ Uncertainty as to who was in possession of the summit led, however, to its being spared bombardment until late in the afternoon.²

¹ The M.W.B. of 4th July 1932, in an article on the storming of Kemmel, says "the enemy's resistance collapsed like a house of cards". General Palat, in his history of the war (xiii., p. 223), admits "in the first and 'second lines there is not a trace of real resistance or serious struggle to be found, although the 22nd and 30th Regiments had the right to wear 'the fourragère. It has been truly said, 'The support and counter-attack troops were not brought into action either by the battalion or 'regimental commanders. They remained passive and inert, whilst the 'units of the first line were submerged, and when the enemy reached 'them they suffered the same fate.'"

² Even as late as 8 p.m. on 25th April, it was believed at the headquarters of the Second Army that parties of French troops were still holding out on Kemmel hill; but there does not seem to have been much foundation for this belief, except reports from the air: planes sent expressly for the purpose reported that there were rows of French lying on the summit—probably wounded and dead. British participants say that resistance was finally broken by 10.45 A.M. Boullaire (p. 298) says:

"It is impossible to say how long the troops who were surrounded on 'Kemmel hill held out. There were deep dug-outs in which perhaps the

The 456th Field Company R.E., under a subaltern, the other officers having been killed on the 24th, and one company of the 19/Lancashire Fusiliers, which tried to return to Kemmel hill and counter-attack, were overwhelmed by machine-gun fire from the ground and from aeroplanes, and were nearly annihilated.

The Germans pressed on down the northern slopes of Kemmel, over the Klein Kemmelbeek (a tributary of the Kemmelbeek, sometimes called the Vijverbeek, flowing into Dickebusch Lake) in the valley which separates Mount Kemmel from the Scherpenburg—La Clytte spur. About 11 A.M. the enemy halted on the Kemmelbeek behind a defensive artillery barrage: the *Alpine Corps* had captured 2,600 prisoners and 12 French field guns.¹

Further to the west, the French 154th and 34th Divisions had offered but little more resistance than the 28th. Passing in the mist on either side of Dranoutre, which was dealt with later, the *4th Bavarian* and *22nd Reserve Divisions* overran the front line and by 10.30 A.M. had formed a defensive flank past Locre—excluding Locrehof, which did not fall until 12.30 P.M.—to the Kemmelbeek, and there halted, having taken 1,400 prisoners. "After 11 A.M., the "pressure on the French virtually ceased."²

"defenders had taken shelter during the bombardment, and they would "have been confined or captured there. The last authentic message "which reached General Robillot's headquarters was timed 9.50 A.M., "and came from the officer commanding the 416th Regiment, saying his "headquarters were surrounded. Other messages of very suspicious "origin (*sic*), forwarded by the British air service, stated several times "during the day that . . . 'French troops are still fighting on Kemmel' " . . . 'Are lying on the northern slopes' . . . 'Are advancing again " 'down the southern slopes' [such were the genuine messages of the "R.A.F.]. These items of information which, strangely enough, corre- "sponded exactly to the various targets of our artillery, were never con- "firmed by our aeroplanes."

Goutard's "Kemmel" does not clear up the point, but speaks of the "wounded escaping like madmen seeking safety in flight", and "a panic" (pp. 83-4), and states that one tunnel was blocked at 8 A.M., and the troops in it surrendered at 10.30 A.M. (pp. 87-8).

¹ The German bulletin for the day claims that 6,500 prisoners in all were captured, "mostly French". Goes' Kemmel gives the total of British taken as 150-200, plus 50 later in the day.

Of the British batteries in the French area, in addition to the losses of the 19th Dn artillery, the 84th of the XI. Army Brigade R.F.A., lost 2 guns by enemy fire; the 72nd of the XXXVIII. Army Brigade R.F.A., 3 guns by enemy fire, and all the officers wounded; the 66th Siege Battery (8-inch howitzers) of the II. Brigade, put its guns out of action, as capture seemed imminent.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 502. The failure of the Germans to exploit their success appears to have been due, it will be seen from Note at end of Chapter, to fear of counter-attacks, and to the order that the troops

The headquarters of the 28th Division at Abeele (7 miles north-west of Kemmel) received early information of the German attack by means of a message dropped from an aeroplane.¹ On the Scherpenberg the officer commanding the infantry of the 28th Division got no news until a runner from the 22nd Regiment, next to the British, arrived at 6.45 A.M., with a message reporting that all three battalions were engaged and asking for reinforcements. He then sent forward the II. Battalion of the 99th, the reserve regiment, which served as a rallying point for the fugitives. At 8 A.M. the telephone officer of the 30th Regiment reported that the Germans were on Kemmel; it was evident that the front had been badly broken, for not long after machine-gun fire was being directed on the French field artillery on the slopes of the Scherpenberg. The I. and II. Battalions of the 99th were then directed to occupy the subsidiary position Locre—Scherpenberg—La Clytte—Millekruisse (2,000 yards south-west of Dickebusch Lake), but, being very weak, they could not extend beyond La Clytte. Thus a gap was left between that place and the Allied boundary, which was later filled by the British. For some hours these two French units, spread out over nearly three miles, formed the only line of resistance. During the morning they were joined by such of the front-line troops as had managed to escape; by half of the dismounted men of the French 3rd Cavalry Division (the reserve of Robillot's corps); and by various detachments of engineers, cyclists and motor machine-gun batteries. All available artillery fire was concentrated on the northern and southern slopes of Mount Kemmel. In the course of the afternoon, even after touch was re-established on the left with the British at La Clytte, General Robillot was forced to report to General de Mitry that his remaining forces were only sufficient "de tenir sur la ligne".

The situation of the 154th Division, on the west of the 28th, was less critical, as at midday it had two battalions

should not go forward to their final objective until the artillery had been brought up. This movement was delayed by Allied artillery fire and the difficulties of the ground. Disorganization and serious loss of officers, no doubt, had also something to do with the halt. Even at 6 P.M. the Germans were not ready to attempt an advance. Goes' Kemmel, p. 132, says that "on the front of the *X. Reserve Corps* [which attacked the French, but did not include the *56th Division*], the German barrage hindered the further forward movement of the infantry".

¹ The message was: "I can see a very dense barrage falling on the southern slopes of Kemmel. Visibility is very bad, and I cannot follow the movements of our infantry, which has twice called for our barrage."

in reserve, and in the afternoon was supported by the remaining half of the dismounted men of the 3rd Cavalry Division. It was able to make a small counter-attack before it was later reinforced by the dismounted men of three regiments of the 2nd Cavalry Division. The 34th Division, at the hinge of the German advance, had no difficulty in maintaining its second position.

Plans were now made by General de Mitry for a counter-attack to recapture Mount Kemmel, but, as the British were to take part in it, the account of the operations will be given later in the narrative.

The British front, divided between the commanders of the 27th, 146th, 64th, 26th Bes and 39th Dn Composite Brigade (Br.-Generals W. D. Croft, G. A. P. Rennie, H. R. Headlam, J. Kennedy and A. B. Hubback), and very thinly occupied by weak units, was attacked by the right of the German *56th Division*, and the *19th Reserve*, *13th Reserve* and *7th Divisions*.¹ In the 9th Dn, the two thousand yards on the right next the French were held by three companies of the 12/Royal Scots (27th Be), beyond which was a gap of six hundred yards, covered by two Lewis gun detachments of the 4th Tank Brigade, placed, with the fourth company, on the left rear; in the curved salient, touching Wyttschaete, were the 1/5th West Yorkshire (146th Bde, attached to the 27th Be), and, up to Dome House, the 1/East Yorkshire (64th Be) and the 1/6th West Yorkshire (146th Bde), with two companies of the 7/Seaforth Highlanders (26th Be) close behind the left flank. Beyond this point, in the outpost line, were two companies of the 5/Cameron Highlanders (26th Be), and No. 2 Battalion of the 39th Dn Composite Brigade. Each of the five brigadiers had a battalion in the Vierstraat Line, the other units being, some in the Cheapside Line, some farther in rear, with the fourth battalion of the 39th in the switch connecting to the line of resistance; the machine-gun companies were distributed among the battalions.

Fought as the battle was in the mist, with wire communications broken, until the afternoon its conduct lay mainly in the hands of battalion and company commanders,

¹ The *56th Division* was directed on Hill 44 (near the southern end of the Cheapside Line); the *19th Reserve Division* on Vierstraat; the *13th Reserve* on Wyttschaete, Grand Bois, and Bois Quarante; the *7th Division* on the Damstrasse (held by two companies of the 5/Cameron) and St. Eloi behind it.

with such assistance as the artillery could give, mounted officers and n.c.o.'s being employed to obtain information.

On the right, shortly before the assault, fire was opened by the four machine guns with the Royal Scots on suspected areas of concentration, but two of them were soon knocked out, as were all the trench mortars of the 9th Dn. As soon as the enemy was seen at the wire, he was met by rifle and machine-gun fire, and all his attempts to get through failed except at two places, whence he was immediately ejected, so that a message could be sent to the 6/K.O.S.B., in the Vierstraat Line, stating that the position was intact.¹

The effect of the rapid advance of the Germans through the French front soon made itself felt. Numbers of French troops by 6.30 A.M. were seen retiring, without gas helmets, along the Kemmel—La Clytte road, the Allied boundary, with the Germans at their heels; all the information which could be obtained from them was "gaz" and "tout est perdu". It was a wounded battery commander from the French area who brought the first news of the assault to the 27th Be headquarters. By 7 A.M., when the message from the Royal Scots reached the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the latter were already fighting against envelopment: in fact the first information that reached the 27th Be headquarters that anything had gone seriously wrong was that the K.O.S.B. were being attacked. As visibility improved, field artillery was seen retiring and Germans moving towards the gap on the left of the Royal Scots, so the fourth company and battalion headquarters were used to form a defensive flank facing east. But very soon this defensive flank was driven north-westwards and the front line enveloped on both flanks. Eventually the survivors tried to withdraw to the Vierstraat Line, only to find, on reaching it at 9 A.M., that the Germans were already in possession of parts of it. So they fought their way back to the Cheapside Line, where they arrived three officers and 40 men strong: even by nightfall, after stragglers had come in, only 88 could be mustered. The two forward companies of the K.O.S.B., attacked from the flank and finding behind them parties of French prisoners being organized by German guards, also retired, soon after 7 A.M., losing half their men in the process, to the Cheapside Line, where the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. (64th Be) was holding the flank.

¹ The 88th Regt., the right of the 56th Division, which attacked here, is said, in contradistinction to the others, to have suffered from "very heavy" artillery and gas fire". Goes' Kemmel, p. 129.

Finding the enemy indisposed to come farther, the reserve of the K.O.S.B. counter-attacked and took 58 prisoners. At 8.30 A.M., the 11/Royal Scots, the third battalion of the 27th Be, in reserve, was ordered to send two companies to the Cheapside Line, but, owing to fire, they were unable to reach it, and entrenched just west of it.

The 1/5th West Yorkshire had, like the 12/Royal Scots, held up the assault; whereupon the Germans resorted to sniping fire from two hundred yards' range, machine gunning and low-flying aeroplane attacks. For two-and-a-half hours the Yorkshiremen continued their resistance. By that time the Royal Scots on their right had retired. On the left, in the mist, the Germans, using flame throwers and trench mortars, had broken through the front of the 1/East Yorkshire and 1/6th West Yorkshire at two places, and by working outwards were getting in the rear of these units. The two battalions fell back fighting a rearguard action, and making prolonged stands in the various woods: a particularly effective resistance was offered by the 1/East Yorkshire in Onraet Wood. But both units lost so heavily, that eventually only 29 and 46 men, respectively, reached the Cheapside Line. The commanders of the above battalions and of the 1/5th West Yorkshire had all been on the western edge of Wytschaete Grand Bois, but they had no available reserves except the headquarters personnel and two platoons, which also became involved in the fighting.

Left isolated, with both flanks exposed, but its front still intact, the 1/5th West Yorkshire, between 9 and 10 A.M., engaging the enemy all the time, fell back slowly north-westwards to the Vierstraat Line, which was reached about 11 A.M. Near Vierstraat touch was gained with the 1/7th West Yorkshire (the reserve of the 146th Bde, formed as a single company) and the 9/Scottish Rifles (temporarily attached to the 26th Be). These two battalions then prolonged north-westwards the defensive flank which the 1/7th West Yorkshire had already formed. The 1/5th West Yorkshire remained with them.

In the 26th Be sector of the front, the two companies of the 5/Cameron Highlanders repulsed the German assault. When the line of the 64th Be to the south was broken, these companies with two others in support, battalion headquarters at The Mound, and the two companies of the 7/Seaforth Highlanders, formed a defensive flank, facing south, as soon as daylight came. This was attacked in great strength

almost as soon as it was in position, but held fast, although casualties were heavy. At 11.30 A.M. the front line was subjected to a fresh bombardment, as was also the line of resistance behind it. A renewed attack followed from the south; there were heavy losses and, as the day wore on, the flank was pushed back, although, with the help of a company of the 9th Machine-Gun Battalion, the Highlanders' line was maintained.

Next on the left, No. 2 Battalion of the 39th Dn Composite Brigade was subjected to bombardment; but no infantry attack was launched against it except on the extreme right, where two platoons were driven in a short distance, and a defensive flank was formed.¹ News of the attack and the disappearance of the French 28th Division was slow in trickling back, and it was not until a wireless message was sent from Second Army headquarters at 10 A.M. that 9th Dn headquarters knew that the French had lost Kemmel; that they were holding a line Scherpenberg—La Clytte; and had received instructions to maintain the La Clytte—Vierstraat position until a counter-attack could be made.²

But as early as 7.30 A.M. a message was received by Lieut.-General Godley from the 9th Dn, that Germans had appeared from the south between the second and third British lines. The corps mounted troops, corps cyclist battalion and Nos. 6 and 7 Motor Machine-Gun Batteries, were instantly ordered to report to the 9th Dn, by which they were sent early in the afternoon to the Cheapside Line, south-east of Dickebusch Lake. At 8.25 A.M., Major-General N. J. G. Cameron (49th Divn) was directed to move the 147th Bde, with the 57th Field Company R.E., forward from Poperinghe to Ouderdom; subsequently he sent the 148th Be, his last, accompanied by the 147th Trench Mortar Battery, southward from Brandhoek to the same destination, which they reached at 2 P.M. At 1 P.M. the 147th Bde moved off to gain touch with the French at Millekruis and fill the space between them and the Cheapside Line. By 3 P.M. it was found, however, that the French flank was farther west at La Clytte, and the detachment then took position between that locality and the Willebeek stream, just west of Hill 44 in the Cheapside Line.

¹ The attacking troops belonged to the 393rd Regt. of the 7th Division.

² The message was picked up by the Germans, but was not deciphered and issued by Fourth Army headquarters until 5.15 P.M. Goes' Kemmel, p. 309.

At 9.20 A.M., Major-General D. G. M. Campbell (21st Dn) had begun to make preparations to form a defensive flank, facing south, by sending No. 3 Battalion of the 39th Dn Composite Brigade from the northern part of the Cheapside Line to hold the ground from Dickebusch Lake eastwards towards the Vierstraat Line, south of Voormezele, reinforcing it on the right at 10.10 A.M. by two companies of the 6/Leicestershire (110th Be). At 10.30 A.M. two companies of No. 1 Battalion of the 21st Dn Composite Brigade were ordered to fill the gap in the defensive flank between Voormezele and The Mound, and at 11.15 A.M. No. 1 Battalion of the 39th Dn Composite Brigade, from the northern part of the Vierstraat Line, was despatched to strengthen the centre part of the flank.

Thus towards noon a skeleton defensive flank had been formed from Dickebusch Lake to the original front on The Mound, where the 5/Cameron and two companies of the 7/Seaforth Highlanders still held out. Br.-General A. B. Hubback (39th Dn Composite Brigade) was made responsible for the line behind this flank from the Cheapside Line to The Bluff, close to which line all his four battalions were situated, two of them forming the defensive flank. In front of this flank, Vierstraat, in the second line, was held by the 1/5th West Yorkshire with the 1/7th West Yorkshire and 9/Scottish Rifles north of it, while various other points in that line, and the whole of the third line, Cheapside, were still in British possession. The Germans were pressing northwards towards the flank, and at the same time trying to push on westwards; but they were always under considerable artillery fire, whilst the movement of their large reserves was being hindered by the British heavy artillery, which, with a certain amount of aeroplane observation, was able to keep under fire the roads along which the enemy was advancing. At one time it looked as if his foremost troops must capture some of the XXII. Corps heavy batteries, but they never got so far.

Soon after midday, the Germans gained possession of Vierstraat, but there they paused.¹ West of Vierstraat, it was the resistance of the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. (64th Be), under Lieut.-Colonel A. J. McCulloch, and of the small reinforcements

¹ Vierstraat was captured by the 73rd Reserve Regt. of the 19th Reserve Division, but "tired and wounded to death, the exhausted troops could not think of further advance", and the support regiment was used up in feeding the attack and filling gaps; "enemy artillery, too, inflicted heavy losses on the regiment". Goes' Kemmel, p. 137.

which joined it in the Cheapside Line, that was to bring the enemy progress to a stop, making the third, and decisive, bulwark in the defence of the broken flank, the first and second being those already formed by the Cameron Highlanders in the Damstrasse and the West Yorkshire near Vierstraat.

At 2.45 A.M., a few minutes after the bombardment began, Br.-General H. R. Headlam (64th Be), from his headquarters in a farm a thousand yards south-east of Millekruisse, had ordered the 9/K.O.Y.L.I., in camp behind the Cheapside Line, to stand by, and send out a patrol to ascertain the situation. Fifteen minutes later, he despatched a warning message to his third battalion, the 15/Durham L.I. at Dickebusch. Lieut.-Colonel McCulloch rode forward to Wytschaete Grand Bois, and, after reporting an infantry assault to be imminent, moved his battalion to Hill 44, a ridge at the western end of the Cheapside Line. Nothing certain was known until 8.30 A.M., when a French orderly arrived at 64th Be headquarters with the news that the French had retired from the front line. Disorganized troops could by now be seen falling back on Millekruisse.¹ British troops (6/K.O.S.B. and 12/R. Scots) were also observed retiring from Parret Farm, in the Vierstraat Line, due east of Hill 44, soon followed by Germans. The 156th Brigade R.F.A. (33rd Divn), in action behind Vierstraat, had now to retire, abandoning, after dismantling them, three howitzers for which there were no teams; but it left one battery in position, with two guns on the hill and three just in front of it.

Br.-General Headlam then sent an order to the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. to hold on to the Cheapside Line and check the enemy advance; but before the message arrived the battalion was closely engaged. This unexpected resistance took the Germans by surprise; they were thrown into considerable disorder and suffered many casualties. At that juncture appeared the Lewis gunners of the 13th Tank Battalion to protect the right flank of the K.O.Y.L.I., and a little later the 8/Black Watch, the reserve of the 26th Be at Ouderdom, ordered up by Br.-General J. Kennedy, at the request of Br.-General Headlam, sent up one company to the right rear of the K.O.Y.L.I. This reinforcement arrived about 12.30 P.M., and Lieut.-Colonel McCulloch was informed that not only the Black Watch, but also the 15/Durham L.I., were

¹ The message from the French 28th Division, timed 5 A.M., announcing the German assault, did not reach 9th Dn headquarters until 3.20 P.M.

on their way to his assistance; he was therefore again directed to hold on, but act as he thought best.

Although the front attack against Hill 44 had been checked, enemy troops could be seen working round the right flank towards La Clytte.¹ Fire was immediately opened upon them, and this brought them to a standstill; but as the teams failed to come up to remove the three guns posted forward of Hill 44 these had to be temporarily abandoned. One of the guns on the hill was got away later. By midday, however, the Germans had discovered that the main resistance in this quarter was coming from Hill 44, and a bombardment was directed on it, in the hope of dislodging the defenders.

All this time the position of the foremost troops was unknown, and the fog of war was not dissipated by the arrival at 64th Bde headquarters, at 11.25 A.M., of a belated pigeon message from the 1/East Yorkshire and 1/6th West Yorkshire, reporting that Wytschaete Grand Bois was still held. This statement was soon discounted by the arrival of the survivors of the 12/Royal Scots and 6/K.O.S.B. Most of the other messages coming from the front suffered similar delays; but, about 12.45 P.M., there arrived an officer's report, despatched only half an hour earlier, stating that parties of the 1/5th West Yorkshire and other troops of the 146th Bde from the front were in the Vierstraat Line, in the village and northwards, and later these were in touch with the left of the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. Towards 2 P.M. the 8/Black Watch arrived on the right of the 9/K.O.Y.L.I.; and shortly afterwards the 15/Durham L.I. joined it and put one company into the Cheapside Line. For the rest of the day, the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. and the troops with it—except the one remaining field gun on the hill which was sent away as it drew heavy fire—maintained their position, suffering somewhat from shelling, but checking any attempts of the enemy to advance against or past them. Three times did the Germans come within a hundred yards of the line, only to be forced back by fire to the shelter of ruined buildings near the Kemmel—Vierstraat road, and to be driven thence into the open again by the fire of the 9th Dn artillery.

Thus before the afternoon was over, the efforts of the German *19th Reserve* and *13th Reserve Divisions* to push

¹ The Germans belonged to the *186th* and *88th Regts.*, the centre of the four regiments of the *56th Division*; the left regiment, the *450th*, had taken Kemmel village, and, on the right, the *118th* had attacked the British right.

through the British front and form a flank from The Bluff to Dickebusch Lake had come to an end through heavy losses and fatigue, while the reserve (the *3rd Guard Division*) which should have supported them had got no farther than Wytschaete Ridge, where it had halted under artillery fire.¹ So weak and disheartened did the enemy line appear to be on his front that Lieut.-Colonel McCulloch, at 7 P.M., suggested that if a counter-attack against Kemmel were contemplated the line of advance from Hill 44 was very suitable; but at 10 P.M. he reported that the Germans were digging in opposite his battalion and just west of Kemmel village, so that, if they settled down on Mount Kemmel, the position on Hill 44 might become unpleasant. His battalion finished the day's work by making a counter-attack with one company, under cover of which the gunners recovered the three abandoned field howitzers.

The first situation report, sent at 11.45 A.M. by the Second Army to G.H.Q., gave the situation as it appeared to be at 10.30 A.M., namely: that the French were back on the line Scherpenberg—La Clytte—Millekruisse, whilst the XXII. Corps was thought to be holding the Vierstraat Line from south of the village past the north of Wytschaete to the original front line. Further, the movement of reserves, designed to form a solid barrier from the left of the French to the Ypres—Comines canal behind the 9th and 21st Dns of the XXII. Corps, was set forth, with the addition that the 25th Dn was being moved from the north-east of Poperinghe to Reninghelst, behind the junction of the French and British. It was also stated that the 19th and 34th Dns of the VIII. Corps, west of Poperinghe, had been warned to be ready to move at short notice, and that the intention was for troops of the XXII. Corps to co-operate in a counter-attack in preparation by the French, in which their 39th Division, placed by the D.A.N. at the disposal of General Robillot, would take part.

During the morning, General Plumer motored to General de Mitry's headquarters, where it was arranged that at 5 P.M. the counter-attack should be launched by the French 39th Division, fresh from three months' rest in the Toul area, in conjunction with the British 25th Dn (Major-General Sir E. G. T. Bainbridge), whose ranks, thinned by two great battles, and still sadly short of officers and n.c.o.'s, had been filled with recruits from home.

¹ Goes' Kemmel, p. 189.

At 4.15 P.M. the Second Army, under the impression, based on the air reports, that French troops were still holding out on Kemmel hill, and that the British occupied the whole of the Vierstraat Line, reported to G.H.Q. that orders had been given for the XXII. Corps to hold the front, Vierstraat Line, to about abreast of St. Eloi—The Bluff—Hill 60—Zillebeke—White Chateau, covered by outposts: that the D.A.N. was to re-establish the line which it had lost, and that the artillery both of the 25th Dn and of the 38th (lately covering the 34th Dn) had been placed under General Robillot to support the counter-attack.

On receipt of these orders, Lieut.-General Godley, who meantime had moved forward the 89th Bc (30th Dn) from east of Poperinghe and at 2.50 P.M. placed it at the disposal of the 21st Dn, issued his own orders, based on General Plumer's, adding that any part of the Vierstraat Line which had been lost was to be recovered. The complete line indicated in Second Army orders was never occupied, as the portion of the Vierstraat Line up to and including the village was in the enemy's hands. The 21st Dn orders, issued at 7.30 P.M. with later information, directed the 39th Dn Composite Brigade to hold the defensive flank, with a main line of resistance and an outpost line, in front of Voormezele.

This in fact was the line actually held, so that at night-fall the front ran from the point of junction with the French south-east of La Clytte to join the Cheapside Line at the Willebeek just south of Hill 44, where the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. still stood. Thence it ran zig-zag along the Cheapside Line for two miles to Ridge Wood, crossing to the Vierstraat Line 2,000 yards north-east of the village, and proceeding along that line to Voormezele, which was held; finally it ran into the outpost line at Bus House (just north-west of St. Eloi) and on to The Bluff. The only change in the situation since the afternoon had been near St. Eloi. The two forward companies of the 5/Cameron Highlanders, in the craters near The Mound, had held on in spite of attacks and bombardments; orders for retirement to the Vierstraat Line had reached the battalion in the afternoon, but it was impossible to carry them out till dusk, so that it was not until 8.15 P.M. that the few survivors of the two front companies fell back on Bus House, where battalion headquarters, the rest of the battalion and the two companies of the 7/Seaforth Highlanders were established. As soon as the Highlanders evacuated St. Eloi and The Mound,

the enemy occupied them, but made no effort to advance farther.¹

During the night, the 39th Dn Composite Brigade, reinforced by the 1/Lincolnshire and 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 62nd Be from Ouderdom, and by the 16/Manchester (21st Dn Composite Brigade), took over the whole defensive flank from Ridge Wood in the Cheapside Line to The Bluff, and relieved various small detachments holding it. The Highlanders near St. Eloi and the 1/5th and 1/7th West Yorkshire and 9/Scottish Rifles near Vierstraat, then withdrew to the Cheapside Line. The reserves were pushed forward: the 147th Bde, released by the arrival at the front of the 25th Dn took the place of the survivors of the 27th Be, originally on the right, and the 8/Black Watch, took position alongside the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. (64th Be) on Hill 44; the 148th Be, at Ouderdom, was placed at the disposal of the 9th Dn, the 56th Be (19th Dn) being brought forward to replace it there, and at midnight the 19th Dn was ordered to move at once into assembly positions about Ouderdom, ready to occupy prepared defences anywhere between that village and La Clytte.

The projected counter-attack had not taken place; no more had the continuation of the German attack, planned for 6 P.M.:² it is easier for the higher staffs to order such movements than for the executants to set them going.

General Robillot, in informing the D.A.N. at 9.15 A.M.

¹ The following extract from an official report, entitled "The Storming of St. Eloi and Voormezeele", issued by the headquarters of the German Fourth Army, and printed in "Res. Regt. No. 13", p. 189, shows that morale on the enemy's side had fallen low and required to be cheered up. It runs: "During the afternoon a line was reached from which the assault on St. Eloi could be launched. The fire of the artillery was directed against the strongly fortified positions among the ruins of the houses. . . . At 8.30 P.M., orders were received to assault. Westphalians on the left and Magdeburgers on the right dashed forward against the enemy who, shattered by our well-directed artillery fire and unnerved by the incredible élan of our infantry, ceased to resist. In utter panic, those who remained sought safety in flight. Machine-gun bullets rattled after them and caused heavy casualties. Thus St. Eloi fell into our hands and a fresh proof had been given that no topographical obstacles, no defensive measures, and no resistance, however obstinate, could withstand a German assault. The prisoners resignedly recognized the supremacy of their opponents."

The regimental history in question has a whole chapter devoted to "The storming of St. Eloi and the position east of Voormezeele"—for Voormezeele was not captured. At the close of the battle it states that the average strength of the companies of the I. and II. Battalions of the 13th Reserve Regt. was 5 officers and 23 men, and of the III., 9 officers and 36 men, sufficient tribute to the young soldiers of the 5/Cameron Highlanders.

² See Note at end of Chapter.

of the loss of Kemmel, had stated that he had no troops available for counter-attack, and, in reply, General de Mitry had handed over to him the 39th Division (General Massenet), his only infantry reserve, then around Steenvoorde—Winnezele, some thirteen miles in an air line from Kemmel. By 10.30 A.M. this division had received instructions to move to an area north of the Scherpenberg. At the interview between Generals Plumer and de Mitry, when the hour of 5 P.M. was fixed for the counter-attack, it was arranged that the 39th Division and the British 25th Dn should attack on either side of the Reninghelst—La Clytte—Kemmel road. It soon became obvious that the 39th Division could not reach the starting line by 5 P.M. : even at 2.30 P.M. the heads of its columns were only just crossing the Abeele—Poperinghe road, six miles from the Scherpenberg. At 3.30 P.M., General Robillot therefore postponed the attack until 3 A.M. on the 26th.

At 4.45 P.M., the 25th Dn reached Reninghelst and then passed under General Robillot's orders. After receiving the warning order for the 3 A.M. attack, the division soon after 6 P.M. moved forward to the assembly position on the La Clytte—Millekruisse road, where the line was held by the 147th Bde.

Thus the day ended without any exploitation of the important success the enemy had won at dawn. One definite result, however, had been achieved: the officers of the D.A.N. no longer spoke contemptuously of the British failure to stop the Germans; but for all that they did not cease to regard the fighting in Flanders as a British job, for which they showed no enthusiasm.

The German *Sixth Army* stood fast, so on the rest of the front north of the La Bassée canal, in the I., XI. and XV. Corps areas, the day, except for shelling, and some raiding by the I. Corps, passed uneventfully.

In spite of poor visibility, the air forces of both sides had been very active during the day against ground targets, and there was much desultory fighting. Ten German planes were brought down by various means in the Kemmel area, and, though no British machines were lost there, several officers were wounded by fire from the ground or in combat. A not unimportant factor, perhaps, in the day's fighting, was that during the night of the 24th/25th sixteen bombs had been dropped on the German *Fourth Army* headquarters at Courtrai, which, at any rate,

damaged the telephone communications,¹ and possibly contributed to the nervousness of the high command on the 25th.² To this, the enemy had replied by dropping 16,000 kilos (16 tons) of bombs on Poperinghe, which, by General Plumer's orders, was always evacuated by night.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 25TH APRIL

Map 25.
Sketch
28.

The German plan for the 25th was that (right to left) the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, with the *7th, 13th Reserve, 19th Reserve* and *56th Divisions*, and the *X. Reserve Corps*, with the *Alpine Corps, 4th Bavarian* and *22nd Reserve Divisions*, should, as a first objective, reach the line: southern end of Dickebusch Lake—Kemmelbeek—northern outskirts of Dranoutre—Haegedoorne, with, on the right, a defensive flank from the Ypres—Comines canal at its bend at Lock 8 to Dickebusch Lake. The *X. Reserve Corps* was then to push forward and form a defensive flank on the left of the attack: Krabenhof Farm (north of Loere)—the Scherpenberg—Reninghelst. Thus protected on either flank, the divisions in second line, *3rd Guard, 233rd, 214th* and *10th Ersatz*, with the *49th Reserve Division* in general reserve, were to push through for exploitation past the east end of Mount Kemmel towards the Poperinghe—Vlamertinghe road, so as to cut off the Ypres Salient, the second objective being the line Vlamertinghe—Brandhoek ridge—Reninghelst. The *Guard Corps*, northwards of Ypres, which had failed so far to dislodge the Belgians, was to be ready to take advantage of any success in the south to push forward.

A barrage, with mustard gas and lacrymatory shells, was to be put down from 2.30 to 4.30 A.M. by the whole of the artillery—consisting of 191 field batteries, 129 heavy and many super-heavy batteries, assisted by the artillery of the *Sixth Army*—on the Allied batteries and on troops in reserve. Then would come a pause of half an hour, after which the infantry positions would be shelled for one hour except in front of the left wing of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, where fire would cease at 5.45 A.M. The infantry attack was to be launched at 5.45 A.M. by the left wing of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, and at 6 A.M. by the remainder of the troops.

The two corps attacked as ordered. Everything went well, and at 9.7 A.M. General von Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, telephoned to Ludendorff informing him of his intentions for the further development of the attack, and these he issued, at 10 A.M. as orders to the corps, emphasizing the necessity for pushing forward the artillery as quickly as possible, and of bringing up the second line divisions into very close support. The corps were to continue the advance, but only after the first objectives had been well established and when sufficient artillery, amply supplied with ammunition, had been brought into position. They were to report to the *Fourth*

¹ *Fourth Army Diary*, p. 295.

² See Note at end of Chapter.

Army headquarters the hour at which they could resume the attack. The *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, after having reinforced its left wing, was to continue the attack all along its front, with the object of capturing as quickly as possible the Ypres—Vlamertinghe—Brandhoek road and the line Brandhoek—Reninghelst; the *X. Reserve Corps* was to form the left defensive flank from Reninghelst to Dranoutre; in order to do this, a powerful force of artillery was first, and as soon as possible, to be brought up to the neighbourhood of Kemmel. The *Guard Reserve Corps* (on the left of the *X. Reserve Corps*) would for the time being remain on the defensive, supporting the *X. Reserve Corps* with the whole of its artillery. The *49th Reserve Division* would remain in reserve, but would be made available for the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, if necessary.

At 9.40 A.M. Lossberg telephoned to the Chief of the Staff of the *Guard Corps*, telling him of the successful way in which matters were developing, and ordering him to be ready to follow up if the British abandoned the Ypres Salient.

General Ludendorff was not so optimistic as Lossberg; even at 9.7 A.M., during the telephone conversation, he had stressed the very possible delivery of counter-attacks by the enemy and the necessity of keeping reserves well forward, and he continued to repeat this caution at intervals throughout the day. Thus, at 11.30 A.M. he again telephoned to Lossberg, warning him of the counter-attacks which must certainly be anticipated; whereupon Lossberg warned the corps of the *Fourth Army* against the danger of advancing too far without sufficient artillery support.

After reaching the first objective in the French area, the pace of the two corps slowed down; but in the early afternoon Lossberg was still full of hope of a resounding success. At 2.30 P.M. he pushed forward the *10th Ersatz Division* to the inner flanks of the *XVIII. Reserve* and *X. Reserve Corps*. At 3.15 P.M. he telephoned to the *Guard Corps* that it was practically certain that the enemy would evacuate the Ypres Salient owing to the pressure further south: if this occurred and the British and Belgians fell back slowly to the line Ypres—Bixschoote, the *Guard Corps* was to press them back frontally; if, however, they fell back behind the Yser canal, the left division (*236th*) should operate west of the canal, moving in the sector allotted to the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*. To this, the Chief of the Staff of the *Guard Corps* replied, "the patrols pushed forward" by the *Guard Corps* have everywhere encountered solid resistance".

Lossberg continued to give much thought to the possibility of a British counter-attack. Air reports reached him of great movement on the Dunkirk—Furnes and Dunkirk—Bergues railways, and of columns on the march from north to south towards Westoutre.¹ By 5.15 P.M. the British wireless message of 10 A.M. had been deciphered, which announced the loss of Kemmel and the necessity of holding the line La Clytte—Vierstraat until a counter-attack could be delivered. In addition, French prisoners taken during the day spoke of reinforcements in the neighbourhood of Poperinghe. Lossberg was impressed by these corroborative pieces of evidence, and urged the *XVIII. Reserve*, *X. Reserve* and even the *Guard Reserve Corps* to be prepared to repel a counter-attack, and to bring forward the divisions in second line for this purpose.

¹ The French 27th Division was detraining at Bergues and the French 39th Division was moving on Westoutre.

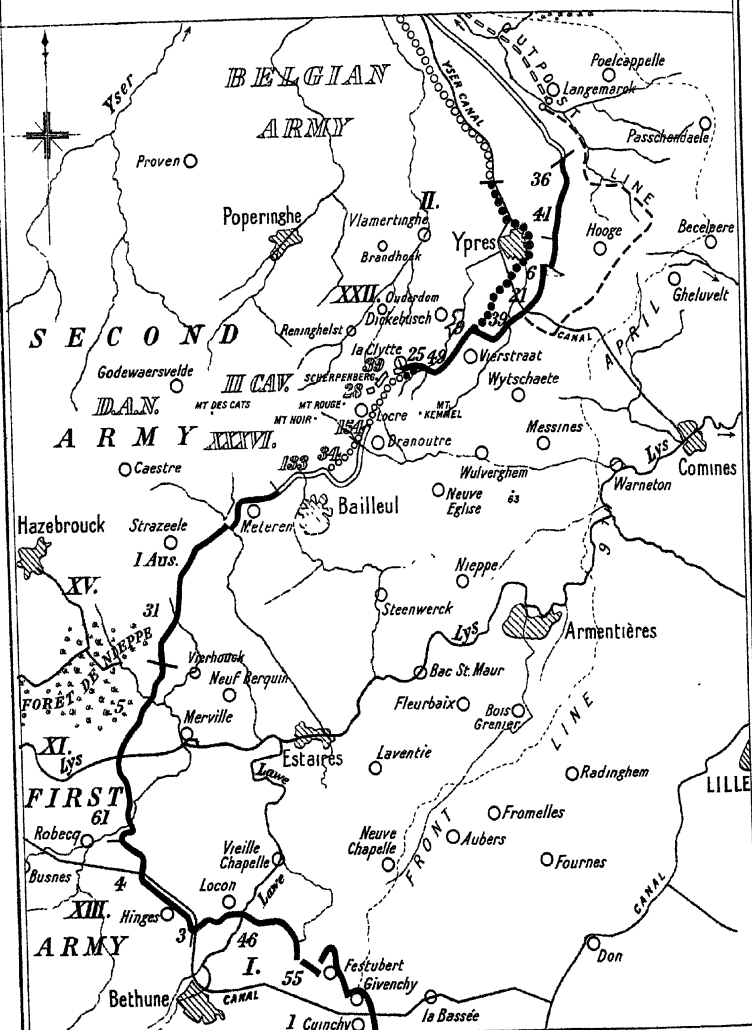
Meantime, the *XVIII. Reserve* and *X. Reserve Corps* had made little effort to get forward, except on the right, where, in the British area, the former was still far from its first objective, Dickebusch Lake and the Kemmelbeek. A suggestion to continue the advance at 6 P.M. brought the reply, at 8.45, from the *X. Reserve Corps* : " There can be no question of the *Alpine Corps* executing this evening the attack with the line Reninghelst—the Scherpenberg—Krabenhof as objective ; for its units, mixed up as a result of the Kemmel operation, cannot be reorganized in time.¹ The attack will be resumed to-morrow, but we have not yet settled the hour with the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*."

During the evening, after consultation with the headquarters of the two corps, Lossberg decided that the offensive should be resumed at 8 A.M. on the 26th April, with the same seven divisions in front line and the same four divisions in the second line.

¹ It had had 12 hours to do so : there is no doubt that the Allied artillery fire had much to say in reducing the enemy activity.

Sketch 29.

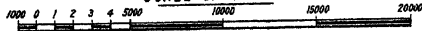
THE LYS, 26TH APRIL.



REFERENCE.

Line 26th April..... British French 27th April a.m. ●●●●●●●●
 Army boundaries..... Corps boundaries.....

SCALE OF YARDS



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*continued*)

26TH APRIL 1918

THE SECOND BATTLE OF KEMMEL (*concluded*)

(Maps 14, 26 ; Sketch 29)

IN the Kemmel—Ypres sector on the 26th April, following the loss of Mount Kemmel by the French on the previous day, there was considerable fighting. Crown Prince Rupprecht had ordered that a general attack against the sector should begin at 8 A.M. For once in a way, a German movement was anticipated by an Allied counter-attack ; but the purpose of the latter, the recapture of Mount Kemmel, was not effected, so, in view of the enemy still manifesting considerable activity, the retirement of the Second Army on Ypres was carried a stage further.

It has been seen how General Plumer had desired that a counter-attack to recover Mount Kemmel and Kemmel village, as well as the old Allied line beyond, should have been made at 5 P.M. on the 25th, some hours after they had been lost ; but, as the French were not ready, zero hour had been postponed till 8 A.M. on the 26th. The French 39th Division and the British 25th Dn were formally placed by General Plumer for the purposes of the attempt under the command of General Robillot (II. Cavalry Corps), who knew the ground. This, he thought, would be the best means of ensuring French co-operation ; further, in order to facilitate liaison, Major-General Bainbridge (25th Dn), after opening a report centre near Reninghelst, himself went to the French II. Cavalry Corps headquarters. General Robillot's orders, timed 3.30 P.M. were not received by the British until after 5 P.M. They prescribed an attack south-eastwards from the line Scherpenberg—La Clytte—Millekruisse, that is frontally against the principal flank of the

Map 26.
Sketch
29.

German salient, although an attack southwards from La Clytte—Hill 44 perhaps offered more favourable prospects. La Clytte—Lindenhoek was made the boundary between the two divisions.

Three objectives were given to the 39th Division; first the northern slopes of Kemmel hill; second, the sunken road on the southern slopes; and third, the original front line. At 7.45 P.M. and 10.25 P.M. both the starting line and the objectives given to the 25th Dn were altered and re-altered by General Robillot. The original objective was the line Kemmel village—Lagache farm; this was changed to Kemmel village—Rossignol Wood, with Lindenhoek—La Polka as final objective; in the third order, the first objective became Kemmel village—wood north-west of La Polka. The right of the counter-attack was to be covered by the advance of part of the French 154th Division, and the left by the 147th Bde and 148th Be of the 49th Divn. The final arrangements for the artillery programme were not issued until 11.55 P.M., and then took time to circulate, as the French, having laid no wires, had to employ runners. From 3 to 3.30 A.M. the barrage was to fall on the line of the Kemmelbeek, which the infantry was to reach by the last-named hour; the rate of advance would be one hundred yards in four minutes to the first objective, and then slow down to a hundred yards in ten minutes, until the final objective was reached.¹

Shortly after dark on the 25th, the weather turned wet; by midnight rain was falling in torrents, and it was pitch dark. The going soon became very heavy, and progress to the jumping-off places was therefore slow. To complete the embarrassment of the troops, as dawn approached and the rain ceased, a thick mist again formed. This, though it would have favoured a carefully prepared attack like that

¹ The artillery available* was:

French	}	field :	4 French groups and 2 British Army brigades ;
154th Division		heavy :	1 French group of 155 mm. and 8 British 6-inch howitzer batteries.

French	}	field :	7 French groups and 2 British brigades (19th Dn) ;
39th Division		heavy :	2 French groups of 155 mm., 5 British 6-inch howitzer batteries and 8 super-heavy howitzers of the XXII. Corps.

British	}	field :	2 French groups and 2 British brigades (38th Divn) ;
25th Dn		heavy :	8 British 6-inch howitzer batteries.

This gave almost exactly one heavy howitzer per 100 yards of front of attack; there had been one per 57 yards at the Somme on 1st July 1916.

The corps artillery of Robillot's and Nollet's corps (3 groups of 105 mm. and 2 of 120 mm.) and of the IX. and XXII. Corps was available for counter-battery and harassing fire.

of the 21st March, was a terrible handicap to an improvised advance. Among other things it delayed the French artillery, "which had not sufficient time to prepare the entry "of the infantry into action".¹ The barrage fired is described as "thin", so feeble, in fact, that it was taken by the enemy for harassing fire, and provoked no counter-bombardment.

The advance of the 25th Dn, with the 74th Be (Br.-General H. M. Craigie Halkett) on the right, and the 7th Be (Br.-General C. J. Griffin) on the left, which took place punctually at 3 A.M., gained thereby all the advantages of surprise.² Unfortunately they were soon lost. Hampered by the fog, soaked to the skin by the heavy rain and floundering across the muddy ground, the men were unable to keep up with the artillery barrage; the Kemmelbeek, too, was found to be in flood, and its steep banks proved to be a serious obstacle. The 74th Be, notwithstanding, crossed the stream, rushing or driving back the German outposts on the northern bank; portions of all three of its battalions entered Kemmel village, over a mile farther on, where there was house-to-house fighting, and they even pushed back small parties found beyond it. The 7th Be, which encountered stouter resistance and more uncut wire than the 74th after crossing the Kemmelbeek, eventually came up level, but overlapped a little, as in the fog the leading companies had drifted a little southwards. Thus touch was lost with the 147th Bde on the left. The right battalion (1/4th Duke of Wellington's) of that brigade, following the divisional order to conform to the movement of the troops on the right, did not go beyond the Cheapside Line,³ and, when the Germans subsequently attacked its right owing to the gap on that side, formed a defensive flank. On its left, the 9/K.O.Y.L.I., having received definite orders to take part in the attack and to advance at 4.25 A.M., duly went forward nearly half a mile; but, finding no troops on either side, it fell back at 7 A.M. to a line four hundred yards in front of its starting point, having lost 9 officers and 250 other ranks. The 148th Be, next on the left, having been instructed to conform to the advance, went forward a couple of hundred

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 504.

² In front line were the 3/Worcestershire and 9/L. North Lancashire, with the 11/Lancashire Fusiliers in support, and the 4/S. Staffordshire and 10/Cheshire, with the 1/Wiltshire in support. The 75th Be (Br.-General C. C. Hannay) was in reserve.

³ These orders were given in the expectation that the French would not advance very far.

yards, but was forced to retire. The Otago Mounted Rifles and 9/Scottish Rifles,¹ farther north, were also to have taken part in the attack, but the orders did not reach them in time.

Thus an advance to the first objective, more or less protected on its left flank, had been made ; but no French troops appeared on the right, and, in view of this, the 25th Dn waited until about 6.30 A.M., when its support line began digging in behind Kemmel village. The French 39th Division had started half an hour late, and "from the very moment it began its advance struck against infantry strong in numbers and well provided with machine guns ; it hardly did more than pass through the exhausted medley of units holding the front and establish a solid line south-east of the Scherpenberg".² The two battalions of the 154th Division which had been detailed to cover the right flank of the 39th conformed to its action.

Thus, being unsupported, about 8 A.M. the advanced parties of the British 25th Dn were withdrawn ; both the 74th and 7th Bes were suffering from machine-gun fire from the right rear where the French were expected to be ; it was obvious that once the fog lifted their position would be untenable. The whole of both brigades therefore were withdrawn independently about 9 A.M. to the north side of the Kemmelbeek, and there they began digging in, with a gap between them which was subsequently filled by a company from the 75th Be ; but touch had been obtained with the French on the right and with the 147th Bde on the left.

The counter-attack was over. The troops concerned felt it had failed on account of bad staff arrangements, poor artillery support, and the lack of drive exhibited by the French infantry. There had been useless waste of life ; one battalion commander even sent in a very strongly worded protest against what he called "this discreditable affair". Nevertheless some results of value had been obtained : first, the French had established a continuous defended line between the enemy and the weak and scattered units which, during the previous afternoon and night, had formed the only barrier to the German entry into the Flanders plain ; and, secondly, the *Alpine Corps*, the *56th Division*, and part of

¹ The Otago Mounted Rifles, which included part of the old 4th Australian Light Horse, were XXII. Corps mounted troops. The 9th Scottish Rifles were now attached to the S. African Be of the 9th Dn.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 504. The order to consolidate the line gained was given at 8.15 A.M.

the *19th Reserve Division*, which the counter-attack had struck, were pinned down by it and took no part in the German attack on this day. This fell only on the troops to the north and south of the Kemmel sector.

To the south, at 8 A.M., the *4th Bavarian Division*, on the left of the *Alpine Corps*, advanced against the French 154th Division on the Locre front. The attack was brought to a halt by machine-gun and rifle fire, but "a desperate struggle" continued all day". Locre village and the Hospice nearby were twice lost and retaken, finally remaining in French hands; but Locrehof, though recaptured once, could not be retained.

On the left of the Kemmel sector, the attack of the *19th Reserve* (part), *13th Reserve* and *7th Divisions*, struck the flank of the Ypres Salient from near Vierstraat to The Bluff on the northern bank of the Comines canal, held mainly by the 39th Dn Composite Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Hubback). As early as 5 A.M. No. 2 Battalion of this brigade, holding with the 16/Manchester the outpost line between Voormezele and The Bluff, detected enemy troops massing on its front. Unfortunately, the report sent to the 26th Be, to which the battalion was attached, went astray. At 6.30 A.M., moreover, when a bombardment began, the S.O.S. was not seen in the fog, and it was 8.20 A.M. before any message reached the artillery. By that time the enemy battalions had broken the line in several places; by 9.30 A.M. they had reached Spoil Bank on the southern bank of the canal, a thousand yards behind the outpost line, and were also attacking The Bluff on the northern bank. Nearly the whole of No. 2 Battalion and of three companies of the 16/Manchester were killed or taken prisoner; of the latter's fourth company, too, in reserve in the tunnel at Spoil Bank, nearly half was captured. The outpost line had been lost, but in front of the line of resistance—Voormezele to the western edge of Zillebeke Lake—the enemy paused.¹

North of the canal, the right of the outpost line became endangered by the loss of Spoil Bank. The 2/Bedfordshire of the 21st Dn Composite Brigade formed a defensive flank with one company along the canal; but the call for help took an hour and a half to reach divisional headquarters, and

¹ Men of the *165th* and *393rd Regts.* of the *7th Division* were identified as attacking near the canal. This agrees with Goes' Kemmel, p. 148. There seems, therefore, to have been a drift of German divisions southward.

then only three companies of the 1/West Yorkshire (6th Divn) engaged in working on the defences just south of Ypres could be provided. During the day repeated attempts were made by the enemy to capture The Bluff from the Bedfordshire and West Yorkshire, but not until late in the afternoon did he succeed. To meet this danger a new line, connected to the defensive flank, was formed in rear. To the north of The Bluff there was no enemy advance.

Whilst the attack on Spoil Bank was in progress, the *13th Reserve Division*, farther to the south, advanced against the line, the right half re-entrant and the left half salient, between Vierstraat and Voormezele, held by units representing the 26th Be and ten companies of the 39th Dn Composite Brigade.¹ South-west of Ridge Wood, the Germans were stopped by machine-gun and rifle fire; east of it, the Brasserie nearby and a post just south-west of Voormezele were lost, but recovered by immediate counter-attack. From 10.30 A.M. to midday there was a pause, after which Germans were seen dribbling in twos and threes, under cover of trench-mortar fire, over Vierstraat ridge against the 26th Be. Towards 2.30 P.M. the bombardment became intense, and an infantry attack was launched against Ridge Wood. This was repulsed, as was another, made a little farther to the south against the 148th Be. A large party moving across the front in full marching order at a range of some three hundred yards was almost exterminated.

Thus the German attack had, at heavy cost, resulted in the capture of the small part of the Second Army outpost line between Voormezele and The Bluff. General Plumer could not, of course, foresee that the total enemy success would be so small. At 12.55 P.M., therefore, at which time he heard that the Germans had reached the southern edge of Voormezele, and had captured Spoil Bank but were being held at The Bluff, he issued orders for the occupation of several rear lines of defence in order to block their further progress. The French II. Cavalry Corps, the 34th Dn and 59th Divn of the British VIII. Corps and reserves of the British II. Corps were ordered to occupy forthwith the Brandhoek

Map 14. Line, with advanced troops in the Vlamertinghe Line. He decided also to bring back the portion of the Second Army north of the Comines canal, and at 2.5 P.M. issued orders for the withdrawal of the XXII. and II. Corps during the night. The existing line of resistance from Voormezele, past the

¹ The rest of the 39th Dn was to the south of Poperinghe. The 10 companies were provided by No. 1 and No. 4 Battalions and half of No. 3.

western edge of Zillebeke Lake to the boundary with the Belgians north of Wieltje was to become the outpost line, while the Cheapside Line, continued past the ramparts of Ypres and along the Yser canal, two thousand yards in rear of the old one, was to be the new line of resistance. The headquarters of the Belgian Army agreed to conform, and issued corresponding orders at 5.30 P.M. In addition, General Plumer directed that various other back lines should be manned: the D.A.N. was to be responsible for the line Fontaine Houck (a mile north of Meteren)—Scherpenberg—La Clytte, for the defences of Mont des Cats, Mont Noir, Mont Vidaigne and Mont Rouge, and for the newly made part of the East Poperinghe Line from Fontaine Houck to the Abeele—Reninghelst road (3 miles south of Poperinghe) covering Mont des Cats and Boeschepe. The VIII. Corps was to find the garrison for the next sector of this line up to the Poperinghe—Ypres road. The XXII. Corps was to man the continuation of the French line from La Clytte northward: Millekruisse—Dickebusch—Café Belge—Kruisstraat; and the II. Corps was made responsible for the Brielen Line, the further continuation north of Ypres of the same line, as well as for the East Poperinghe Line north of the Poperinghe—Ypres road.

General Foch, on hearing of these precautions, expressed alarm lest the loss of Mount Kemmel and the failure to recapture it might induce Sir Douglas Haig to think that the moment had arrived to fall back to the Mont Noir—Mont Rouge—Poperinghe line mentioned in his Note of the 19th April;¹ he telephoned several times during the day insisting that the withdrawal of the British troops to the west of Ypres "must not be contemplated", although the rear lines might be manned by weak forces—which was being done. He offered to come north "if Marshal Haig did not "feel that he could carry out his instructions", but he issued no Notes affecting the Lys sector. He did, however, take measures to increase the Allied resources in Flanders. He instructed General Pétain to send twelve groups of heavy artillery, two regiments of field artillery, and a pursuit flight of aeroplanes to the D.A.N., and a regiment of pack artillery to the Belgians. To the D.A.N. he also allotted the 31st Division (of the XVI. Corps), already moving up from Amiens to concentrate during the morning at Cassel, whilst its sister division, the 32nd, and

¹ See pages 850-1.

the XVI. Corps troops were to be closed up. To take their place in the step-wise movement of reserves northward, the 46th and 47th Divisions of the XX. Corps were to be moved over the Somme, its 11th and 153rd remaining on the southern side. Thus, General de Mitry now had in reserve the 27th and 31st Divisions, concentrated at Herzele (6½ miles N.N.E. of Cassel) and Cassel, respectively; consequently he allotted the 6th Cavalry Division (less a brigade) to General Nollet (XXXVI. Corps).

Map 26.
Sketch
29.

During the afternoon, Lord Milner, the Secretary of State for War, and General Sir H. Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, arrived at G.H.Q. from London with a view to holding a conference with General Foch next day. With them the Commander-in-Chief discussed the subjects which should be put forward. He urged that the relief of the XXII. and II. Corps by the French should be demanded, so that the command of the front from Meteren to the junction with the Belgians might be entirely in French hands. Sir H. Wilson was very anxious to discover which course General Foch had in mind, if the Allies were pressed, whether it was to cover the Channel ports or to fall back behind the Somme; for he had been informed by the Admiralty that to cover the Channel communications the Dover barrage must be maintained and could not be shifted to the line Beachy Head—mouth of the Somme.

The Summary of Intelligence drawn up by the "I" Branch G.H.Q. gave the following distribution of German divisions on the Western Front: the total still remained 206; 101 had been employed in the Somme battles; 40 (36 fresh and four from the Somme) in the Lys battles; fresh divisions in reserve, 14; divisions of poor quality, 19; fresh divisions in the line not yet called upon, 36. The presence opposite Givenchy of the *1st Guard Reserve Division*, a good formation, seemed to point to a renewal of the offensive in that area; but there were also signs that the attempt to reach the Flemish hills had not yet been abandoned.

The orders of the XXII. and II. Corps for the withdrawal, drafted in accordance with those issued at 2.5 P.M. by General Plumer, were sent out in the course of the afternoon. They directed that the movement should begin at 9 P.M., starting on the left, unless the enemy pressure necessitated an earlier hour. Arrangements were also made to man the back lines, and for minor reliefs, in spite of the enemy keeping under fire all roads leading to the front.

In the early morning, by Lieut.-General Godley's order, the 19th Dn had been moved forward to Ouderdom; at 12.45 P.M. when the greater part of the 9th Dn troops had been relieved by brigades of the 49th Divn, the command of this sector passed from Major-General Tudor to Major-General Cameron. The 9th Dn was withdrawn into reserve; all its available troops, however, including the artillery, remained at the tactical disposal of the 49th Divn. Lastly at 4 P.M. the 25th Dn (with the 38th artillery) passed back from the command of General Robillot to that of the XXII. Corps, but it was maintained in position next to the French. As there was considerable congestion and confusion of French and British troops in the front trenches on either side of La Clytte, the 7th Be was withdrawn during the night, the 74th and 147th extending inwards to take its place. A report that in La Clytte there was a dump of many tons of ammonal which might be exploded by enemy fire served the useful purpose of hastening the return of many men to their units.

Divisional orders were issued about 6 P.M.; but the usual delays ensued in distributing them down to battalions, some of which did not receive them until after midnight. Notwithstanding, the units of the XXII. Corps were able to withdraw practically unmolested and with very few casualties, although the enemy followed up closely. The retirement of the II. Corps and of the Belgians took place without incident.

On the rest of the Lys battle front nothing of note had occurred during the 26th except an attempt made at 2 P.M. by the I. Corps (Lieut.-General Holland), the 55th Divn having returned from rest, to recover the old front-line posts east and north-east of Givenchy. Only two companies were employed, and owing to enemy counter-attacks the affair was unsuccessful, although thirty prisoners were captured.¹ In retaliation, the Germans, at 10 P.M., attacked Route A Keep, which they captured from the 46th Division and held against counter-attack.

On this day, and, it may be added, on the two following days, the weather was too bad for air activity, and very little flying took place apart from a few low bombing and contact patrol flights.

¹ L/Corporal J. Hewitson, 1/4th King's Own, was awarded the Victoria Cross.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 26TH APRIL

Map 26. The enemy plan for the 26th was to reach the objective, Reninghelst—Vlamertinghe, which had not been attained on the 25th. This was to be achieved by an attack at 8 A.M. with seven divisions in front line and four in second line. It was not until 7.20 A.M. and 10.50 A.M., respectively, that the two corps involved reported the Allied counter-attack to the headquarters of the *Fourth Army*. The *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, at the same time, stated that it would resume its attack at 8 A.M., as already arranged, in spite of the forced retirement of the *56th Division*.¹ At 7.30 A.M. the Chief of the Staff of the *X. Reserve Corps*, although actually unaware at that hour that the *Alpine Corps* had been counter-attacked by the French, also notified that this corps would resume operations at 8 A.M. Nevertheless, in spite of messages urging them on sent by the corps, the divisions on which the Allied attack had fallen made no movement throughout the day.²

The history of the Bavarian *Leib Regiment (Alpine Corps)*, p. 375, gives as reasons, that "there was lively fire on the left flank from Loore; that fog prevented any reconnaissance and view; that no artillery observers had appeared; that the fog prevented artillery registration; and that the situation on either side of the *Alpine Corps* was obscure". "Bav. Jäger Regt. No. 1", p. 340, says the attack "did not get going, on the one hand, because owing to the fog and other circumstances the artillery had not opened fire at the time ordered, and, on the other, because the regiments were not ready. When the fog lifted at midday, severe enemy artillery fire was received. At 5 P.M., orders were received that the attack would not take place to-day."

At 8 A.M. only the outer wings of the two corps attempted to attack—the *13th Reserve* and *7th Divisions* of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* against the British, and the *4th Bavarian Division* against the French—and met with little success. About 2 P.M., General von Lossberg, Chief of the Staff of the *Fourth Army*, on the advice of the Chief of the Staff of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, decided that the offensive should be postponed until the 27th April. Orders to this effect were issued by the *Fourth Army* at 3.15 P.M., but the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* was instructed to make every endeavour to increase any success it had gained during the day with its right wing, by advancing westwards and north-westwards beyond the Kruisstraathoek (1½ miles south-west of Kruisstraat)—Vierstraat road in order to drive back the British troops holding the line east of Dickebusch Lake. For the new attempt on the 27th, three fresh divisions from Army reserve were to be added, two divisions (*3rd Guard* and *233rd*) to the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* and one division (*214th*) to the *X. Reserve Corps*.³ At 6.15 P.M. the attack was postponed to the 28th April,

¹ This was the division opposed to the 25th Dn.

² *19th Reserve* (part) and *56th Divisions* of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, and the *Alpine Corps* of the *X. Reserve Corps*. British prisoners taken at the time subsequently reported that the German rank and file to whom they spoke were without enthusiasm or hope of winning the war.

³ The *3rd Guard Division* had been engaged in the March offensive, but

and at 6.45 P.M. the Chief of the Staff of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps* recommended Lossberg to put it off to the 29th April, as he considered that time was necessary to relieve divisions and to bring up ammunition. General von Lossberg accepted this view, with the reservation that the offensive should be resumed immediately, in the event of the situation demanding such a course. At 8.45 P.M. he issued the orders for the postponement.

had been resting since 4th April. The *233rd* was fresh, having been at rest and training in the Saverne area since 20th January. The *214th* had been engaged in the Lys battle 10th-13th April, but since then had been resting at Lille.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GERMAN (LYS) OFFENSIVE IN FLANDERS (*concluded*)

27TH-30TH APRIL 1918

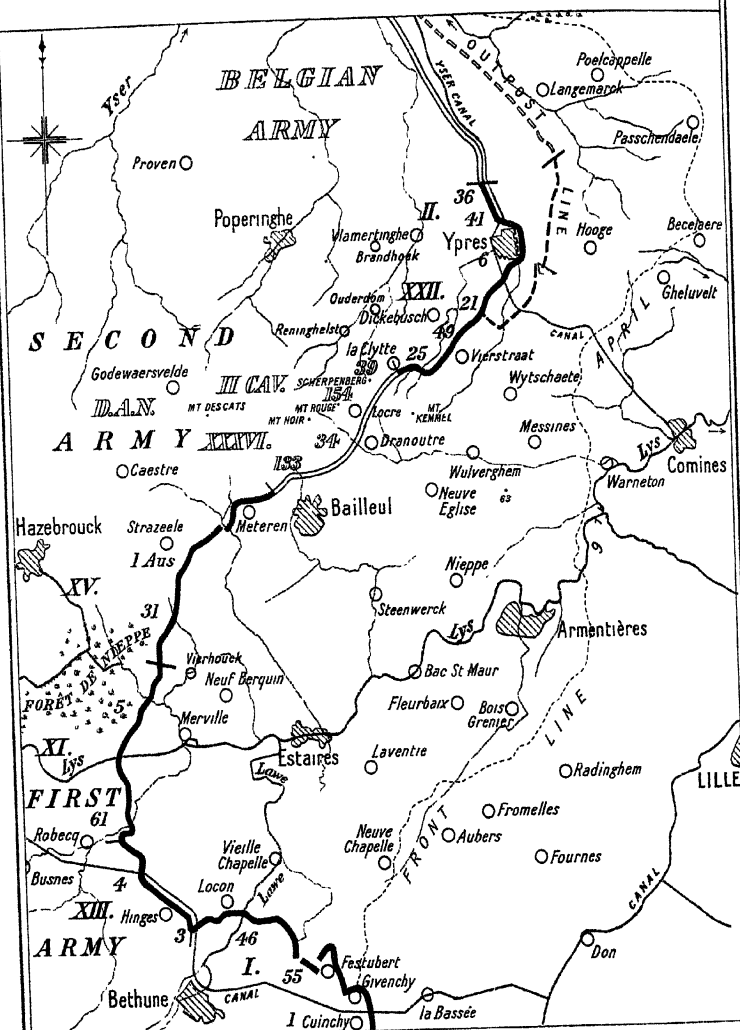
THE BATTLE OF THE SCHERPENBERG

(Map 26 ; Sketches 30, 31)

Sketch
30.

DURING the 27th and 28th April, the enemy was forced to pause in his offensive in order to relieve exhausted divisions and replenish ammunition in preparation for a fresh effort, which materialized on the 29th. But the front in Flanders was by no means quiet : violent bombardments, continued shelling of roads, and local infantry fighting on various parts of the line took place. In the I. Corps area (Lieut.-General Sir A. Holland), Festubert and its neighbourhood were heavily shelled by the enemy on the afternoon of the 27th, but no infantry attack followed. On the other hand at midnight on the 28th/29th, after a short bombardment, Route A Keep was recovered, with the capture of 54 prisoners, by two companies of the 1/5th S. Staffordshire (46th Divn), and, after a hard struggle, was finally held. In the XI. Corps area (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking), the Germans fired a great number of mustard gas shells into Nieppe Forest—without much result, thanks to the effective precautions taken—in addition to shelling the whole front of the corps ; but all their raids were repulsed by the fire of the 5th Division, so that no attacker reached the British line : retaliation was carried out with special concentrations of fire. In the XV. Corps area (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle), the enemy was quiet, and a successful raid was made by the 10/East Yorkshire (81st Dn) at 3.30 A.M. on the 27th, near La Becque (immediately west of Vieux Berquin) ; 44 prisoners were taken, and twice that number of the enemy killed and wounded at the cost of 20 killed, wounded and missing.

THE LYS, 27TH APRIL.



Line 27th April
Army boundaries

A horizontal scale bar with markings at 1000, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5000, 10000, 15000, and 20000.

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

In the area of the XXII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir A. Map 26. Godley) there was considerable fighting around Voormezele, when, at 3.20 P.M. on the 27th, the Germans succeeded in capturing the central keep in the village from the 39th Dn Composite Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Hubback). The brigade recovered it by an immediate counter-attack. A relief by the 89th Be (Br.-General R. A. M. Currie),¹ already ordered, was carried through; but in the midst of it, at 10 P.M., the enemy attacked again and obtained a foothold in the village. An hour earlier, a party of two hundred and fifty Germans had made a surprise attack against the trenches of the 110th Be (Br.-General H. R. Cumming), near the elbow of the canal east of Voormezele, and captured them. Next day fighting was resumed, the command of Br.-General Currie (89th Be) being extended to include from Ridge Wood to Lock 8. The enemy, pushing down the canal, secured Lock 8, so a new outpost line had to be established from the north-eastern outskirts of Voormezele to a point about seven hundred yards north of Lock 8, where touch was established with the 110th Be. An attack at 8.15 P.M. against the S. African Be, south of Ridge Wood, failed.² During this day all the corps heavy artillery was withdrawn behind the line Reninghelst—Vlamertinghe.

On the French front the enemy's activity was limited to artillery fire; advantage was therefore taken of this interval to withdraw the 28th Division, which had suffered heavy losses in the Kemmel fighting, the 39th Division taking its place next to the British.

On the 27th, General Plumer issued two memoranda. Sketch The first pointed out that the voluntary withdrawal of the 30. left of the XXII. Corps and the II. Corps on the previous night, to which the Belgians had conformed, had been due to the forcing back of the D.A.N. and right of the XXII. Corps: that the policy remained as before: every yard of ground must be contested and all ranks must understand this: successive rear lines were in course of construction, but every opportunity must be taken to strengthen and improve the front lines: local counter-attacks should be made freely, if possible from a flank, strongly supported by machine guns: the artillery policy of counter-battery,

¹ Major-General D. G. M. Campbell (21st Dn) had under his command, besides his own 62nd and 110th Bes, the 39th Dn Composite Brigade, the 89th Be and the 21st Composite Brigade of the 30th Dn.

² This brigade, from 11.30 A.M., had come under the orders of the 49th Divn.

harassing and annihilating fire must be vigorously maintained. The second memorandum, which was secret and precautionary, and addressed only to corps commanders and the G.O.C. of the D.A.N., gave an outline of the policy to be carried out should it become necessary to withdraw the front line farther : stress was laid on the necessity of holding on to the Scherpenberg—Mont Rouge—Mont Noir system : should further attacks fail, General Plumer concluded, the enemy " will be compelled to desist or bring up " fresh divisions from his main reserve ".

On the 27th, too, the Franco-British conference mentioned in the previous chapter was held at Abbeville at 10 A.M.¹ Its principal object was the discussion of an arrangement made on the 24th between General Pershing and Lord Milner as to the transport and employment of American effectives. This agreement, M. Clemenceau complained, had not been communicated to the French, and, as General Foch had informed him, would seem to indicate that all American troops now arriving were to go to the British. Lord Milner explained briefly what had happened. It had been arranged in February that six American divisions should be transported in British ships, and on arrival their artillery should be trained under American direction, using French material, but that the rest of the troops should be given experience with British divisions for about ten weeks, after which each division would be reunited for training under its own officers. On the 27th March, in the midst of the crisis of the German offensive, Mr. Baker, the Secretary for War, then in France, General Pershing and General Bliss, the American Military Representative with the Versailles Council, had, at the earnest wish of the British military authorities recommended to the President that infantry and machine-gun units should be shipped in preference to complete divisions. To this proposal, assent had been given on the 2nd April, but it was made clear at a conference on the 7th April, between Mr. Secretary Baker and General Pershing and the British authorities, that such a preferential arrangement could not be regarded as permanent ; that the infantry and machine-gun units of four of the six divisions, some sixty thousand men, to be transported by the

¹ There were present the French Prime Minister, General Foch, General Weygand, General Mordacq, Lord Milner, Sir Douglas Haig, General Sir H. Wilson, Lieut.-Generals Sir H. Lawrence and Sir J. Du Cane, with Br.-General E. L. Spears as interpreter.

British, plus 45,000 reinforcements, should be brought first ; that such infantry units as were to sail in American ships should go to the French ; and that there should be a later agreement as to troops subsequently brought over. After the beginning of the Lys offensive on the 9th April, further extraordinary efforts had been made to increase the British shipping available for American troops, and on the 21st General Pershing went to London. As a result, the Pershing-Milner agreement had been cabled to Washington on the 24th April. The first clause of this was :

“(a) that only the infantry, machine guns, engineers and signal troops of American divisions and the headquarters of divisions and brigades be sent over in British and American shipping during May for training and service with the British Army in France up to six divisions, and that any shipping in excess of that required for these troops be utilized to transport troops necessary to make these divisions complete. The training and service of these troops will be carried out in accordance with plans already agreed on between Sir Douglas Haig and General Pershing, with a view, at an early date, of building up American divisions.

“(b) That the American personnel of the artillery of these divisions and such corps troops as may be required to build up American corps organization follow immediately thereafter, and that American artillery personnel be trained with French matériel and join its proper divisions as soon as thoroughly trained.”

Provision was made for varying these arrangements should the situation demand it, but always with the object in view that the American divisions and corps when trained and organized should be formed into an American group under an American Commander-in-Chief.

M. Clemenceau at once acquiesced, but said that he would like subsequent arrangements to be settled by the three Governments in unison ; in this, Lord Milner naturally concurred.¹

The American question settled, Lord Milner raised that of “roulement”, that is the transfer of tired British

¹ The Pershing-Milner agreement was formally approved at a meeting of the Supreme War Council on 1st and 2nd May, when urgent appeals from both the French and Italian representatives for American replacements or units to serve in their Armies were considered. The Council committed itself finally to the formation of an independent American Army as early as possible.

divisions to quiet sectors of the French front.¹ He made objection to divisions of the British Army being scattered among the French. To this, M. Clemenceau and General Foch both replied that nothing would be done without Sir Douglas Haig's approval, and, in any case, the divisions would be kept together as one corps.² Sir Douglas Haig then explained the general situation, and recommended as the solution of the difficulties of the moment that the French should take over the front of the British XXII. and II. Corps, that is from the left of the D.A.N. to the junction with the Belgians; that these two corps should then relieve the French divisions held in reserve behind the British Third Army; and that, if the Allies were forced back to the line St. Omer—Dunkirk, the whole front north of St. Omer, including the Belgian portion, should be placed under a French commander. General Foch did not share these views: as ever, he was opposed to relieving troops during a battle; but he announced his intention of making another visit to Flanders to review the situation on the spot. He declined to discuss with General Wilson the immediate formation of salt water inundations near the coast, saying that the control of these was in the hands of General de Mitry (D.A.N.), who had the Governors of Dunkirk and Calais under his orders: for operations, de Mitry was subordinate to General Plumer, but the latter had nothing to do with inundations, which were a local matter solely con-

¹ He had as his brief a memorandum written by the C.I.G.S., Sir Henry Wilson, on 24th April, in which he said:

"If this policy is pursued, the British Expeditionary Force will cease to exist as a separate, compact and national army. The respective punishments up to date between the British and French Armies in this battle have been, roughly, that in 57 divisions we have lost 250,000 men, and in 100 divisions the French have lost 50,000. The logical sequence of such procedure [sending British divisions to quiet sectors of the French front] would be that the British Commander-in-Chief and G.H.Q. would no longer be necessary and that even the Army commanders might be found difficult to fit into the new arrangements. Logically again our present bases of Havre, Rouen, Boulogne, Calais, etc., should be taken over by the French, and, as I say, the B.E.F. as such would cease to exist."

To meet the case, General Wilson proposed that the French should take over the front of the British Third Army or that the British should take over "a solid block of the line, say an Army front of 10 divisions in a quiet sector", and carry out their own "roulement".

² At this date only IX. Corps headquarters and the 50th Dn had been sent to the French; but one division from the Second Army and another from the Fourth were to follow immediately, and a fourth from the Second Army as soon as it was relieved by the French. On 30th April, General Foch pressed the Commander-in-Chief to interchange more, say 10 or 15, divisions; but Sir Douglas Haig said that he was not prepared for the moment to go beyond the four originally promised.

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cerning the French Government. M. Clemenceau also complained of the British decision to bring 12 battalions back from Salonika, and this matter was left to be settled by the Supreme War Council. Subsequently, after the meeting, he evaded General Wilson's attempts to ascertain whether as a plan he favoured covering the coast ports or retiring behind the Somme; all he would say was that the Germans would not be allowed to reach Mont Noir and Mont Rouge.

General Foch then proceeded to visit General Plumer, General de Mitry and General Gillain (Chief of the General Staff of the Belgian Army), and was able to assure himself that there was good hope of the Allied line holding fast. He again insisted on "the fundamental principles on which "the defensive must be based" and laid emphasis "on "the necessity of clear instructions to all troops, including "those upon the point of arrival, as to their action in the "battle". He did, however, take measures to make good the losses sustained by the D.A.N., ordering the 32nd Division to be sent up by lorry from the Tenth Army to an area west of Cassel, followed by the XVI. Corps troops, and directed that its place should be taken by moving forward the 129th Division to Fauquembergues (12 miles S.S.W. of St. Omer), where it was to remain in readiness for a march northwards at very short notice. He also warned General Pétain that he must be prepared to send more troops by rail, receiving in return the 28th Divn. badly mauled at Kemmel on the 25th, and later the 154th and 183rd. To this, General Pétain replied that the 168th, 42nd and 121st Divisions could be detrained near Bergues between the 2nd and 5th May.

On the 28th April, G.H.Q. addressed a secret memorandum to the Army commanders, as a general guide to the scheme of defence and the construction of defensive works. In this the general policy was outlined on the basis that no voluntary retirement should be made, that the Channel ports should be covered, and that close touch should be kept with the French Army on the British right.

In the course of the 28th, the normal symptoms of ^{Sketch} imminent attack became very marked, and they were confirmed by the statements of prisoners, also of deserters whose arrival henceforward preceded every German attack, that it would be launched on the following day in the neighbourhood of Kemmel. Counter-artillery preparations were

ordered to catch the attackers, and these seem to have been most effective in discouraging the German battalions.

In order to secure the Allied junction, at 5.15 P.M. the La Clytte Defence Force, a British force under French command, was formed from the 75th Be, which had taken the place of the 74th next the French. It consisted of the two battalions in the line, the 105th and 106th Field Companies R.E., two companies of the pioneer battalion of the 25th Dn, and one company of machine guns; it was placed under the command of Colonel Matter (commanding 153rd Regiment, 39th Division) at 7 P.M. The remaining battalion of the brigade and a machine-gun company were left with Br.-General Hannay for counter-attack purposes.

Sketch
31.

At 3 A.M. on the 29th, although it must have been obvious from the counter-bombardment that surprise was out of the question, the enemy began a gas bombardment of the 10-mile front from the Douve (south of Locre) to Zillebeke Lake, held by the French 154th and 39th Divisions (Robillot's corps), and parts of the British 25th Dn, 49th Divn, 21st Dn and 6th Divn. After two hours of gas came 40 minutes' shelling of the defences with high explosive; finally at 5.40 A.M. the assault by seven German divisions, with four more in second line.¹

Low clouds persisted again, but visibility was slightly better than on the previous days, and great numbers of enemy aircraft appeared over the front in support of the attack. Many encounters occurred, in which four German aeroplanes were destroyed, and one shot down by infantry; only one British machine was missing. Observers were able to fulfil their duties, and were particularly successful in indicating good targets to the artillery.

Only on the extreme flanks was any success gained by the enemy's attack: on the south against the French, near the Scherpenberg, and, on the north, against the Second Army outpost line near Voormezele. The attack in the French sector was met by artillery in positions, unknown to the Germans it now appears, in the valley of the Grootebeek near Reninghelst, and by intense rifle and machine-gun fire; but the *Alpine Corps*, whose task was to capture the Scherpenberg, pressed on regardless of losses. It broke the line of the II./414th Regiment and,

¹ The assault was made, from south to north, by the 22nd Reserve, 4th Bavarian and 10th Ersatz Divisions, the Alpine Corps, the 233rd, 3rd Guard and 13th Reserve, with the 214th, 56th, 19th Reserve and 49th Reserve Divisions, recently relieved, in second line.

exploiting this entry, gained the col (Hyde Park) between Mont Rouge and the Scherpenberg, capturing Loere and Krabenhof Farm, north of it. The most alarming reports began to reach General Plumer, General Foch and G.H.Q.

The G.O.C. (General Massenet) of the French 39th Division, at 8.50 A.M. telephoned personally to Major-General Bainbridge (25th Dn) that he had lost Mont Rouge, and had no means of recovering it. Soon afterwards, from the same source, 25th Dn headquarters received by hand a message, stating that: "there is no doubt but that the enemy holds Mont Rouge and Mont Vidaigne [west of Mont Rouge]. Troops on right of Scherpenberg badly cut up. Am using another battalion to stiffen them. Remainder of reserve is being used to hold line covering Reninghelst. Enemy reported to be pushing between the Scherpenberg and Mont Rouge." These messages, the 25th Dn sent on to the XXII. Corps. The Commander-in-Chief, when about 10 A.M. he heard the news, with the addition from General Foch that the Scherpenberg had been lost, immediately sent his Chief of the General Staff to General Plumer, who had reported by telephone the situation as painted by the French. Lieut.-General Lawrence had to tell him that G.H.Q. had no more troops to send, and that he must use his own judgment about falling back from the Salient, but bear in mind that "the situation is never so bad, nor so good, as first reports indicate". This suggestion turned out to be correct; Major-General Bainbridge had telephoned General Massenet's message on to Br.-General Craigie Halkett (74th Be) with instructions to reconnoitre Mont Rouge, and the latter soon reported that neither French nor Germans were on the hill. This information was passed on to the French 39th Division, and back to corps and Army headquarters.

General de Mitry had already given instructions for the movement of his reserves. At 8 A.M. he sent orders to the 27th Division, in reserve near Herzelee, to move to a position west of Steenvoorde (8 miles west of Reninghelst); the 32nd Division, at Ledringhem (4 miles N.N.W. of Cassel) was to march to a position two miles west of Poperinghe, with a view of supporting the Belgians, if necessary; the reserve brigade of the 6th Cavalry Division was to move forward to Le Temple, north-west of Steenvoorde. An hour later, at General Plumer's request, he put the 31st Division, then near Abeele (6 miles

north-west of the Scherpenberg), at the disposal of General Robillot, who directed it to assemble in a position from which it could counter-attack towards Locre and Hyde Park.

The local reserves had, however, eliminated any source of danger in the situation. Those of the 154th and 39th Divisions had counter-attacked inwards towards Hyde Park, and, after heavy fighting, had reached that place, had joined hands there, and by 1.15 P.M. had driven the *Alpine Corps* back down the slope to La Couronne Wood, north-east of Locre. Although the enemy retained part of Locre, he had lost heavily, and was plainly exhausted; so in the afternoon comparative quiet reigned on the French front.¹ At 5 P.M., a fresh counter-attack drove the enemy further away from the col. During the night, the 31st Division relieved the 154th, and then cleared Locre; but a small German wedge still remained in the French front.

On the front of the 75th Be (La Clytte Defence Force), held by the 8/Border Regiment, and on the fronts of the 147th Bde and 148th and South African Bes, the enemy's attack, repeated feebly at 5.15 P.M. after much further bombardment, came to utter disaster under fire of all kinds, the German infantry offering exceptionally good targets. To complete their discomfiture field guns were brought up within a few hundred yards of the front.

On the receipt of the telephone messages reporting the occupation of Mont Rouge and Mont Vidaigne by the Germans, Major-General Bainbridge had sent orders to his 7th and 74th Bes to form a defensive flank; this was counter-ordered at 10 A.M., when the 39th Division officially contradicted the alarmist reports. The good news took longer to circulate to the brigades in the British front than had the false rumours, and it did not reach some till the afternoon.

Next on the left, all three battalions of the 89th Be (18th, 19th and 17/King's) became engaged in desperately hard fighting. A very severe bombardment fell on them—8-inch howitzers participating in it—and extended back at least a mile, so that all wire communications were cut. Two companies on the left were surrounded and captured; the Voormezele Switch became untenable owing to bombardment, so that a withdrawal was made by the left of the brigade to the main line of resistance before a second infantry

¹ The "Leib Regt.", p. 382, states that it left "nearly half its strength" "dead or wounded on the field" on this day. When ordered to attack again at 5 P.M. (see below), the *Alpine Corps* did not move.

attack took place at 8 A.M. The Germans did not follow to the new line; but, in expectation of a further attack, artillery counter-preparation was carried on throughout the day. About 5 P.M. considerable enemy movement was seen opposite the centre; attempts to get in touch with the artillery failed, but by machine-gun and rifle fire the Germans were kept in check until about 6 P.M., when a most effective artillery barrage stopped all further hostile action.

No infantry attack, except an unsuccessful local attack at French Farm (a thousand yards south of Zillebeke Lake), followed the bombardment of the 110th Be sector, which had been similar to that of the 89th Be. In view of the threatening situation in the sector of the latter brigade and the retirement of its left, a switch line between the line of resistance and the outpost line near French Farm was manned, and at 2 P.M. this became the outpost line. An attack made on its left sector half an hour later broke down under the combined fire of all arms, and, in the 110th Be sector, this concluded the fighting for the day.

The 6th Divn, though shelled, was not attacked, and it was never necessary during the day to call on the reserves of the XXII. Corps. No attack was made on the II. Corps, and one attempted against the Belgian right near Lange-marck failed completely.

When, therefore, about 1 P.M., Sir Douglas Haig visited General Plumer, he found all going well. He went on to see General de Mitry, whom he had not met since they were alongside each other in the First Battle of Ypres in 1914. General de Mitry mentioned to him that when he had reported the trouble early in the day, General Foch, on the telephone, had given him a lecture on strategy, "as he always does".

At 5.50 P.M. a message from General Massenet reached the 25th Dn, to the effect that it was intended to deliver a counter-attack with the newly arrived 31st Division, in liaison with the 39th, during the night in order to regain the ground lost near Locre and Hyde Park, so as to straighten the line; he requested that the 75th Be should co-operate by moving strong patrols forward to protect the left of the 39th Division. At 10 P.M. came the further information that the barrage would begin at 1.50 A.M. and the infantry assault follow ten minutes later. Liaison was established with the 153rd Regiment, on the right of the 75th Be, and the 2/South Lancashire was ready on its starting line at

1.50 A.M. The barrage was good and no opposition was encountered, so the South Lancashire reached the position ordered, five hundred yards ahead. But the French next to them were unable to advance, although Locre—as already stated—was retaken by the 31st Division. At 5 A.M. the South Lancashire, finding themselves isolated, withdrew to their original position, having suffered no casualties. Later in the day, at 6 P.M., General Robillot asked that the attack might be repeated, so at 8 P.M. the South Lancashire went forward, again under a good barrage; but this time they had thirty casualties from gun-fire. Again they reached their objective and dug in, but the French, considering the enemy's artillery fire too heavy, did not advance, and the South Lancashire, enfiladed from the right, withdrew once more to the original position, with a total loss of 45. By orders of the G.O.C. 25th Dn, an artillery barrage was maintained 300 yards in front of the position they had reached, in order to allow the South Lancashire to bring in their wounded. General Robillot's counter-attack was the last exhibition of French and British co-operation in Flanders in the spring of 1918.

As will be seen in the Note below, General Ludendorff, in consequence of the state of the troops, had abandoned, at any rate for the moment, all hope of obtaining a decision, and had ordered the operations to cease; but the enemy did not weaken his forces in the north and there was every sign that he might renew his offensive at any moment.

NOTE

THE GERMANS DURING THE 27TH-30TH APRIL

Sketch
31.

During the 27th, orders were issued for the resumption of the attack on the 29th April by the *XVIII. Reserve* and *X. Reserve Corps*. The objective was to be the line: Ypres—Vlamertinghe road—Reninghelst—Westoutre—Mont Rouge. To achieve success it was considered of vital importance to capture, first of all, the Scherpenberg, and, if possible, Mont Rouge; but the most distant part of the objective, and one which required the greater effort, was allotted to the northernmost of the two corps, the *XVIII. Reserve*. This corps, therefore, received special reinforcements, to be placed in the front line, the *13th Reserve* (engaged on the 25th), *3rd Guard* (rested and reinforced) and *233rd Division* (quite fresh). In the second line were the *49th Reserve*, *19th Reserve* and *56th Divisions* just relieved. The *X. Reserve Corps* had the *Alpine Corps* and *4th Bavarian Division* in the front line, and the *214th Division* (which

had been resting after being engaged 10th-13th April) in second line. Generally speaking, all the divisions destined for the attack were in good condition. The *7th Division*, the extreme right of the *XVIII. Reserve Corps*, had been in the line for four weeks and engaged in fighting since the 10th April; it was quite incapable of attacking, as its companies only mustered on the average twenty rifles, and it would automatically be relieved on the 29th, owing to the contraction of front during the course of the attack. The *Alpine Corps* was still in good heart, although short of officers, and quite able to attack supported by the *214th Division*; the *4th Bavarian Division* had had heavier losses, but it was kept in the line on the 29th because of the competence of its commander (Prince Franz of Bavaria), and reinforced by troops of the *10th Ersatz Division*. The left division of the *X. Reserve Corps*, the *22nd Reserve Division*, was capable of playing the necessary defensive rôle.

General von Lossberg (Chief of the Staff, *Fourth Army*) asked for two fresh divisions from Prince Rupprecht, in exchange for the *19th Reserve* and *6th Bavarian Divisions*, and was informed that the *29th* and *121st Divisions*, as well as the *52nd Reserve Division* would be sent, with a promise that if the Army were successful, two more, the *216th* and *79th Reserve*, would be available. The artillery bombardment was to open with gas shelling, which was to last as long as the supplies with the batteries allowed, but not beyond 5 A.M. For the next forty minutes, hurricane fire was to be poured on the hostile positions, after which at 5.40 A.M., the infantry attack would be launched.¹

During the 28th, Lossberg made a few amendments to the orders issued on the 27th, of which the most important was that the *22nd Reserve Division*, on the left flank of the *X. Reserve Corps*, was not only to take part by fire action, but to join in the attack, and, at any rate, to counter-attack the enemy if he attempted to roll up the flank of the *4th Bavarian Division*. One regiment of the *10th Ersatz Division* was placed at the disposal of the *22nd Reserve Division* to help it in its task. There was considerable complaint as to the supply of ammunition, and, up to the afternoon of the 28th, the *4th Bavarian Division* had received no gas shell.

The bombardment on the 29th April opened at 3 A.M. as arranged, and at 5.40 A.M. the infantry was launched to the attack, and aeroplanes went up and took an energetic part in the battle. The Allied artillery, whose reply to the bombardment had been feeble, to the great astonishment and vexation of the Germans began a strong and well-directed fire from positions in the Vlamertinghe—Reninghelst valley hitherto unsuspected, as soon as their infantry advanced. As early as 7 A.M., the reports which reached the *Fourth Army* indicated that, from the very beginning, the infantry had encountered stiff resistance. By 9.45 A.M. Ludendorff "had an impression that the attack was not developing favourably", and he thought that there were grounds for considering "whether to break off the attack

¹ On the 28th, at a final conference between the Chiefs of the Staff of Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies and of the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies*, it was decided that the gas bombardment was to open at 3 A.M. No creeping barrage was to precede the infantry, but such a barrage seems, nevertheless, to have been fired. The printed translation of the *Fourth Army Diary* sometimes converts German time, sometimes does not. In this section, the times appear to be unconverted.

"or to persevere with it". Lossberg was of the same opinion; and at 11 A.M. he telephoned to Ludendorff: "our attacking troops are everywhere encountering a very solid defence organized in depth, and particularly hard to overcome owing to the numerous machine-gun posts. Moreover, at the last moment the artillery seems also to have been organized in great depth. . . ." At 12.55 P.M., in reply to an enquiry for news on behalf of the Kaiser, Lossberg reported that, "owing to the solid nature, and to the organization in depth, of the defence, the attack on this day was meeting far greater difficulties than had previously been experienced". He expressed his intention of continuing the action, making the principal effort with the left of the *233rd Division*, the *Alpine Corps* and the *4th Bavarian Division*, after a concentrated bombardment. This new attack against Millekruisse, La Clytte and the Scherpenberg, was to be made by the *233rd Division* at 5 P.M., and by the *Alpine Corps* and *4th Bavarian Division* at 6 P.M. In point of fact, the *233rd Division* was stopped by fire and failed to make any progress; the *Alpine Corps*, without even warning *X. Reserve Corps* headquarters, did not attack at all; and, as regards the *4th Bavarian Division*, the Bavarian official account merely states, "the offensive power of the German troops was exhausted".

At 8.35 P.M. Lossberg advised Ludendorff to suspend the offensive: later, it would be for consideration whether a methodical resumption of the attack would be likely to lead to success, or whether it would be better to abandon the operations. Ludendorff accepted this advice. After receiving the latest reports at 10 P.M. Lossberg telephoned to General von Kuhl (Crown Prince Rupprecht's Chief of the Staff), asking that the attack might be suspended; and at 10.20 P.M., the headquarters of the *Fourth Army* issued orders that "the attack will not be resumed to-morrow, 30th April, although "minor operations may be undertaken; the present front must be "maintained. . . ."

On the 30th April, stock was taken by Lossberg of the German situation. He came to the conclusion that ten or twelve fresh divisions would be necessary to capture Poperinghe, Mont Rouge and Mont Noir. As these could not be made available, the *Fourth Army* must for the moment pass to the defensive. He considered that the defence of the Ypres and Kemmel sectors was of paramount importance; the *Guard* and *XVIII. Reserve Corps* would be responsible for the first, and the *X. Reserve Corps* for the second.

"The whole Georgette operation was finished; the *Fourth* and "*Sixth Armies* had exhausted their powers of attack."¹

"The storming of Kemmel was a great feat, but, on the whole, "the objective set had not been attained. The attack had not "penetrated to the decisive heights of Cassel and Mont des Cats, "the possession of which would have compelled the evacuation of "the Ypres Salient and the Yser position. No great strategic "movement had become possible; the Channel ports had not been "reached. Our troops on the left flank in the conquered trenches "were in a very unfavourable situation, as they were strongly enfiladed by the enemy. . . . The second great offensive had not "brought about the hoped-for decision."²

O.H.L. considered that more than half of the available French

¹ Schwarte iii.

² Kuhl, p. 155.

reserves were between Amiens and the coast. Therefore, the French front must be attacked, and since the middle of April the "Blucher" offensive, known to the Allies as the Chemin des Dames offensive of the 27th May, had been in preparation. But the attack was to be only a diversion: the British front was, as heretofore, to remain the chief objective. On the 29th April, O.H.L. fixed the date of the diversion attack, against the French, as the 20th May, and the main attack, against the British, as the middle of June. "New George" was to be prepared, with "New Michael" as a feint.¹

¹ Schwarte iii., p. 461.

CHAPTER XXV

SOME REFLECTIONS

MORE legends have been current with regard to the "March Offensive", and its continuation in April, the "Lys Offensive", than about any other great battle of the War. Chief among these are that the great German assault was delivered against the junction of the French and British Armies with a view to separating them and reaching Paris; that it fell equally on the Fifth and Third Armies; that the principal effort was made against the former Army by General von Hutier's forces; that the Fifth Army was badly commanded; that the defences of the Fifth Army were neglected and the bridges over the Somme not destroyed, as ordered; that the Fifth Army was so badly defeated that it ceased to exist; that the situation in front of Amiens was saved by a hastily collected body of engineers and railwaymen known as Carey's Force; that the situation in front of Hazebrouck was saved by the French, after the British had lost Kemmel; and that it was the arrival of the Australian divisions which stopped the advancing Germans in their victorious progress, in March, towards Amiens and, in April, towards Hazebrouck.

How little truth there is in these legends has, it is hoped, been made clear in the narrative. General Ludendorff's plan was to destroy the British Army; the German attack of the 21st March struck all four corps of Gough's Army and only two of Byng's; Hutier's original task was to hold the line of the Crozat canal and the Somme down to Péronne as flank guard, in order to hold off French assistance; the bridges, except some railway bridges for which the British were not responsible, were duly brought down—too thoroughly according to the tank battalions; Carey's Force, of only three thousand men, manned part of a back line, which was occupied by other troops before the enemy approached it in force; the French 28th Division lost

Kemmel; the D.A.N., the French contingent sent to Flanders, did take over part of the line, but rendered little active assistance. As regards the Australians, they certainly arrived in the nick of time in both sectors of the battlefield, and news of their approach no doubt encouraged the British divisions in the line, stimulating them to greater effort; but, to quote the words of the Australian official historian, "if this claim [in the legend] means that the Germans continued to advance until they came up against Australian troops hurriedly brought to the rescue, and that these were the troops that first held the enemy up on the line on which the offensive ended, it is not literally true of any important sector of the Somme front; at Dernancourt, the Germans had been held on that line for a full day by the 9th and 35th Divisions before the 4th Australian Division took over the front. As for the 3rd [Australian] Division's front, between Somme and Ancre, German narratives prove that, owing to the British cavalry's resistance, the plan of attempting to advance there had been abandoned . . . before the Australians became responsible for the front line. German records make it clear that even at Hébuterne the advance had been stopped by the tired defenders before the 4th [Australian] Brigade relieved them. . . . Except at Hazebrouck, where the 1st Australian Division stopped the enemy's progress as completely as did the 5th Division on its right and the 33rd Division on its left . . . the great German offensive was nowhere literally brought to a stop by Australian troops. On practically the whole front taken up by them, the stoppage had already occurred."

Colour was given to the legends about the Fifth Army by the fact that its very name disappeared for a time; for it was changed to Fourth Army, when General Rawlinson relieved Sir Hubert Gough. It appeared also to dwindle to a single corps, the XIX., again a matter of nomenclature; for Lieut.-General Sir H. Watts's command grew to the size of an Army. Of Gough's other three corps, the greater part of the VII. Corps, with all its staff, was transferred to the Third Army; its remaining divisions, and the whole of the XVIII. Corps, were placed under the G.O.C. XIX. Corps; the III. Corps was retained for a time by the French, but returned in time to fight, under the Fourth Army, at Villers Bretonneux, bringing with it two of its original divisions (the 18th and 58th), whilst its new third division, on that occasion the 8th (in place of the 14th), had joined

the XIX. Corps from reserve on the 22nd March. The Fifth Army grew smaller owing to casualties ; it bent, but it never broke ; and its components all remained in being. The legend that certain divisions of the Fifth Army failed is no more true than that the Army as a whole failed until duly relieved, and long after General Pétain, under whose command it came, assumed that the Army had disappeared and had given it up for lost, the divisions continued to put up a stiff fight, as German accounts show. Spread out over a front too long for its strength ; crushed and poisoned by a bombardment the intensity, if not the duration, of which was never experienced before or after in 1914-18 ; assaulted and pursued by a numerically superior and specially trained enemy, the officers and men of the Fifth Army carried out a most difficult retirement, as planned by General Gough, without being even morally defeated and without losing heart.

As regards the treatment of its commander, the words of the late General Hunter Liggett, commander of the American First Army, may be quoted :

"Why the gallant and able Gough was ever blamed, I do not yet understand. He was not so blamed by his chief, but by the civil authorities, who kept an Army in England to repel a mythical invasion and other Armies in the Near East for political reasons. Had Haig been given the reinforcements he pleaded for, Gough would have parried the German blow as Byng parried it, and the first of an ominous series of Allied crises would have been avoided."¹ The British Army and the Allied cause were indeed placed in very grave peril, but the blame must rest on other shoulders than those of General Sir Hubert Gough. The main factors which brought about this situation will be recapitulated, and examined as far as space admits.

In 1916 General von Falkenhayn had come to the conclusion that nothing could be gained by operations in the minor theatres, and that a decision could only be obtained on the Western Front, where the British were "the arch enemy" and "the soul" of the resistance to the Central Powers. But he also considered that the German Army was not strong enough to defeat the British and force them

¹ Major-General J. G. Harbord, Chief of the General Staff of the American Expeditionary Force at the time, has written in "The American Army in France," p. 115 : "I have always felt he (Gough) was made somewhat a scapegoat in the circumstances of the German drive, but not by his Commander-in-Chief".

into the sea, whilst at the same time penning the French behind the Somme.¹ He therefore decided to attack the French at Verdun. Ludendorff, with experience of offensives on the Eastern Front only, having larger forces at his disposal owing to the Russian revolution than had Falkenhayn, and ignoring the failures of the Allied offensives in 1915, 1916 and 1917 to achieve a decision,² adopted the view that he was strong enough to destroy the British Armies, and made their destruction the object of his campaigns in 1918. The three conditions he laid down were: first, that, the strength of the two sides being approximately equal, there were only sufficient troops for one offensive; an alternative simultaneous offensive, even as a diversion, was not possible on any large scale; secondly, the blow must be struck at the earliest possible moment; and, thirdly, "we must beat the British". His strategical adviser, Lieut.-Colonel Wetzell,³ warned him that "any prospect of success in the West depends upon other principles than those which hold good for the East or against Italy", and prepared an admirable plan of operations for approval, based on his master's decision.⁴ Hindenburg's name does not appear in the list of those who helped to make or approve of this plan, or who attended the preliminary conferences, or who gave decisions.

For once, the First Quartermaster-General did not write "*einverstanden*" (approved) on his subordinate's proposals. Wetzell said, in essence, that the methods which had succeeded against the Russians were not likely to lead to victory against the French and British, and that a breakthrough could hardly be attained by a single attack against only one sector of the front: there must be two acts, perhaps more.⁵ In the first act, the British reserves must be drawn to the St. Quentin front, the attack being carried

¹ G.O.A., x., p. 4. General Kabisch has pointed out that "this opinion has at least not been contradicted by events". "Verdun", p. 195.

² General Mordacq, author of a well-known pre-war book, "*Stratégie*", in his later work "*Les leçons de 1914 et la prochaine guerre*", (1934), considers that the Allies in their great offensives had not sufficient men to achieve a break-through; the Germans failed with two to one, and in 1918 obtained their successes at points where they had four or five to one; the partial attacks made with insufficient troops were waste of resources.

³ Now General of Infantry (retired), and editor of the *Militär Wochenblatt*.

⁴ This plan of campaign is epitomized in "1918" Vol. I., pp. 141-2, and given in full in its Appendix 20.

⁵ What would be left of the German Army after a series of offensives against the French, Belgians and British was not discussed.

only to a certain line (Bapaume—Péronne—Ham—La Fère was suggested), and then broken off: next, all the great battering train of heavy guns, trench mortars and aeroplanes of the O.H.L. reserve which had been brought up to smash through the St. Quentin front having been moved northwards, the Flanders front must be attacked in the direction of Hazebrouck: it might be found necessary to have several preliminary acts, for the enemy reserves must be attracted to other sectors before the decisive blow could be struck: in any case, the Hazebrouck act was to be the last. We may be thankful indeed, that in the face of this counsel, Ludendorff should have decided to attempt the frontal break-through in one act, hoping to succeed by weight of metal and force of numbers at one place before reserves could arrive to block the gap. All depended on what the Germans now call "the suddenness of surprise", and upon a crushing defeat of the British before French divisions could arrive in time to save them. In the end, after the first act had failed to break the British front, Ludendorff improvised the second, the Hazebrouck, act, but on a smaller scale and in great haste. Then, when that also failed, he set on the stage, as will be seen later, the intermediate acts suggested as desirable by Lieut.-Colonel Wetzell: in May, he attacked at the Chemin des Dames; in June, at the Matz; in July, near Reims, intending then to replay the second act as his grand finale at Hazebrouck. But too long an interval elapsed between some of the acts; in July the Entente began to take the offensive, and then assumed most skilfully and successfully the very rôle in which the Germans had failed. By that time the latter had already squandered their resources, and Ludendorff's intended last act could never be staged.

The German tactical plan was exceedingly simple. Except in the magnitude of the forces employed, it was of the same nature as tried at Verdun in 1916 and in many of the Allied offensives. It depended on the artillery and heavy trench mortars. A huge breach was to be created in the British front by the concentrated fire of 6,473 guns and 3,532 trench mortars, with unlimited ammunition, and then, after a final burst of heavy trench-mortar fire on the front line, the infantry was to advance without loss of a moment and overcome any remaining resistance. There was in 1918 the difference that the bombardment was of shorter duration but more severe, and the enemy guns were to be neutralized by gas.

In order to obtain superiority of force against the sector selected, although in general total the two belligerents were nearly equal in number, the most skilful measures were taken by O.H.L. to mystify and mislead the Allies—also the German troops—as to the front which was to be attacked. They achieved the desired effect in that the French Commander-in-Chief was completely convinced that the assault would fall on his troops in the Champagne sector, and therefore delayed sending the assistance to the British which had been arranged :¹ his Staff, when asked on the 21st March to put the agreed plan into operation, replied “No! we do not know that this is the real thing”. On the part of the British Intelligence, however, there was no such failure, and, as time progressed, the place, and eventually the time, of the attack were correctly forecast.

The utmost care was lavished on training the troops for the great set-piece which Ludendorff had in mind, and this was not confined to the issue of instructional pamphlets : the corps and divisional staffs were put through special courses, and the divisions were actually exercised on the ground in the new tactics. Even without the employment of tanks great breaches were made in the British line. The “infiltration” method devised was ingenious, but it would not have succeeded as well as it did had British staffs and regimental officers been prepared to meet it : after a time it ceased to be profitable. The artillery bombardments, similarly, were very effective at first ; but in each successive action, with minor exceptions, they accomplished less, owing to there being less time than before the 21st March to prepare them thoroughly, and to the front line being less thickly held when attacked. In a word, the full effect of tactical surprise began to grow less and less.

The marshalling on a given line at a fixed date of three great German Armies, totalling 71 divisions, with all their great battering train, ammunition for over ten thousand guns and mortars, and food supply and medical services required to maintain over a million of moving men with their warlike apparatus, is one of the most remarkable pieces of staff work that has ever been accomplished, and it appears to have been carried out without any mishap, in spite of Allied aeroplane action and long-range fire. All depended on initial success. If the British front defences, after a hurricane bombardment by heavy trench mortars,²

¹ See “1918” Vol. I., pp. 101-2.

² It must not be overlooked that the Germans possessed a better heavy

could be carried with a rush and fresh troops poured into the gap thus created, so as to maintain the impetus of the advance and spread it right and left—to hold the flank on one side and to roll up the raw edge of the line on the other—a decisive victory would be won.¹ There would be neither time nor space for the Allies to organize fresh resistance, for, unlike the Russians, the British had little room for manœuvre in retreat.

But, even against the right wing of the Fifth Army where the numerical superiority of the Germans was greatest, it was not sufficient to break through against a foe of the British calibre. Armies even of the highest fighting capacity cannot make up for inadequacy of numbers by the valour of their troops or by the novelty and brilliance of their tactics; in a conflict between foes of the same standard of skill, determination and valour, numbers approaching three to one are required to turn the scale decisively, as they eventually began to do in the autumn of 1918. The second (Lys) attack, with inferior means and without the seven-weeks elaborate preparations for the bombardment of the 21st March, was hardly likely to succeed after the first attack had failed; although it might have a good initial result if it could score a success, as it did, against the Portuguese. The German efforts with insufficient numerical superiority only produced dangerous salients.

There has been a tendency in Germany to throw the blame on the troops. One important journal has published the following: ²

“Involuntarily the question arises in one’s mind, why “did an offensive begun with such powerful forces peter out after only six or nine days?”

“The key to the riddle must be sought principally in “the psychological and physical condition of the troops. “The best of the old German Army lay dead on the battle-

trench mortar, designed before 1914, than the British, and many more of them.

¹ One German critic, H. von Hentig, in “*Psychologische Strategie des “Grossen Krieges”*”, suggests that the attack was on too wide a front: there should have been one Army, wedge shaped, to break in; two Armies to roll up the British line right and left of the break-in; two Armies to attack right and left and push for the enemy’s communications; and a sixth Army, the strongest of all, with a large force of mobile artillery, followed (not preceded) by cavalry, to “leap-frog” the front Army and reach a strong strategic position to deal with enemy reinforcements. The supply of this group of six Armies would have presented some difficulties.

² *Wissen und Wehr*, September 1924.

“ fields of Verdun and of the Somme. What had later appeared bore an ever-increasing militia-like character. As time passed, the picture gradually changed for the worse, in proportion as the number of old peace-time officers in a unit grew smaller and as they were replaced by young fellows of the very best will, but often without sufficient knowledge. At the same time, the old corps of N.C.O.'s rapidly disappeared, so that finally the difference between N.C.O. and private vanished, very much to the detriment of discipline.”

The article states that bad rations, hopelessness of a final victory, socialist propaganda and the difficult conditions in the Homeland were not without influence on the troops, and with each battle “another bit of the old Prussian spirit was lost”. Even after a few days of the March fighting “cracks in the building” became plainly visible.

This criticism does not seem to be fair to the troops of March-April 1918, although it may apply to the later part of the year. The German army on the Western front, ill-fed according to the British standard, after three and a half years of furnishing strong detachments to prop up its none too effective Allies and hard fighting, during which it suffered such casualties that, after the beginning of the Battles of the Somme 1916, they were not made public, gave a wonderful response in 1918 to the effort demanded from it. At this moment it had been reinforced by active divisions of good quality from the Russian front, where they had for over two years enjoyed easy conditions. Pressing forward with the utmost bravery and splendidly led by their regimental officers, the troops seldom missed an opportunity for gaining ground, and many times seemed to have victory in their grasp.

The real reason for the failure was the impossible task set to the German troops by Ludendorff, misled by his easy successes against Russians and, in spite of Lieut.-Colonel Wetzell's warning, underestimating the fighting qualities of the British, French and Belgians. His original plan—like the Schlieffen-Moltke plan of 1914—was far too ambitious and took too little account of the enemy. He was certainly right to change it radically when the operations failed to take the course he had forecast. He started with an elaborate plan on paper for the *Second Army*, the central one, to break through and, wheeling north with the *Seventeenth*, to roll up the British front, whilst the *Eighteenth*

kept off the French. Possibly from the outset he had something less completely strategic in his mind ; for all depended on a tactical break-through. At any rate, he soon dropped this plan, and when, in the course of the battle, Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria enquired what the strategic objective was, true to Moltke the elder's teaching that strategy is made up of expedients, he answered on the telephone, "I forbid myself to use the word *strategy*. We chop a hole. The rest follows. "We did it that way in Russia." He might have put it in more elegant language, as Napoleon did, "on s'engage partout et puis on voit". But it must not be forgotten that the Emperor with small "short range" armies could "feel" for the soft spot ; Ludendorff had to select it long beforehand and bank on his choice. He has been blamed by some post-war German writers for putting tactics before strategy, but according to the accepted view in Germany before the War strategic victory follows from tactical success. When enormous forces are entrenched on a long line without open flanks—be it in France, Macedonia or Palestine—there can be no manœuvre until a breach has been forced somewhere in the defences. One place may offer better results than another, but vital places—Ypres or Arras, for instance—are apt to be the most strongly guarded. German strategy, both in peace and in war, has always been opportunist, and concerned with looking for weak places rather than with formal objectives. When, on the 23rd March, Gough's Fifth Army seemed to offer the weak spot, Ludendorff did not hesitate to alter the whole scope of his operations : he changed it again and again, and, in desperation, tried Wetzell's "second act" which he had rejected earlier. It is easy to understand why no effort was made to exploit the success against the French at Montdidier; for to have continued in that direction would have lengthened the flanks of the salient which the German attacking Armies had created and made them highly vulnerable. Nevertheless when a little more persistence might have given him Amiens, broken the railway communication between the Allies, and left the British on "an island" so that they could have been dealt with at leisure without weakening the tactical situation, he stopped the operations, as a few weeks later he stopped those before Hazebrouck.

Sketch
11.

Such lack of determination, and such taking counsel with his fears of an Allied counter-stroke, are remarkable

in a man of Ludendorff's supposed character. One explanation suggested is that the German casualties in the March offensive were much greater than admitted; even so losses should not have weighed with a commander in a life-and-death struggle which it was vital to end before the American Army could intervene in force. General Weygand has written, "one cannot help being struck by the contradiction which appears between Ludendorff's strong-willed character and the lack of perseverance in the directing idea which he had conceived".¹ The vacillation and the fear of enemy counter-measures disclosed in his telephone messages preserved in the captured papers of the German *Fourth Army* for the month of April 1918, reveal the cautious amateur rather than a great master of war—or else a gambler maimed by heavy losses. Field-Marshal Haig, like Grant before him, has been blamed for too great a persistence in the pursuit of his object; Ludendorff, more justly for too little. Possibly he was haunted by Clausewitz's precept: "When an offensive goes beyond the culminating point of the power of the attack without having attained its object, any reversal of force which may take place produces a reaction which can be more far-reaching in its effects than the attack".

It would seem that the mind which is capable of planning at leisure a great operation down to its smallest detail, apparently leaving nothing to chance, and little to subordinate leaders, is, even if it has not worn itself out in the process, unsuited to deal with the great issues which suddenly arise when the enemy does not conform to the plan and play the part assigned to him. Command and staff work are quite different arts, and capacity for both is rarely combined in one individual.

To quote Clausewitz again: "Every attack contains within itself the seeds of mortality"; but some of the seeds of the German failure in March 1918 may perhaps be found in Ludendorff's strategic retreat in 1917, and the wanton damage then done to the countryside. The "devastated area", which extended for an average depth of twenty-five miles on the front from Barisis to Arras, undoubtedly slowed down the German advance and increased supply difficulties. There is no doubt, too, that

¹ Preface to "La stratégie allemande en 1918" by General Loizeau. General Weygand considers that the German Crown Prince was, for dynastic reasons, given permission to attempt an offensive mission; this led to a serious upset of Ludendorff's plan and to the dispersal of his forces on too wide a front.

the great offensive of March 1918 would have had a better chance of success had it started from a line 25 miles nearer the Channel coast, in other words from the front which was held in the autumn of 1916 at the end of the battles of the Somme, that is Lassigny—Roye—Péronne—Bapaume, instead of from the line La Fère—St. Quentin—Cambrai, to which the "Alberich" retreat in 1917 had brought the Germans. The battles of the Somme which occasioned that retreat exerted a more far-reaching effect than is usually attributed to them.

A long drawn out war of attrition, as Falkenhayn foresaw at Christmas 1915, was bound to end in the defeat of Germany; she could only win by offensive strategy, and he attacked the French. Ludendorff, with the American Armies in sight, Germany's Allies in extremity and anxious for peace, her own internal situation uneasy, the submarine warfare a failure, and time pressing, was bound to take the offensive or advise his Government to make the best terms they could. He gambled on defeating the British. It is unprofitable to speculate what might have happened had he, instead, elected to attack the French in Champagne.

While in Germany the military leaders had complete control of the war policy, bringing about the dismissal and appointment of Chancellors and Ministers at their will, and finally getting their own way as regards unrestricted submarine warfare, there was, until the 26th March 1918, no unified command in France, and not even a Commander-in-Chief of the land forces of the British Empire. The office of Commander-in-Chief of the Army had been abolished in 1905 when, as a result of the Esher Commission, the Army Council of three civilian and four military members, with the Secretary of State for War as President, had been established in its place. For the unified command of the sea, land and air forces no provision had been made, and, Lord Salisbury had admitted, even during the South African War in 1899, that the British Constitution was ill adapted for the conduct of a great war. In peace time such co-ordination as was necessary was, as a rule, arranged by the Cabinet on the advice of the Committee of Imperial Defence, which consists of the principal members of the Cabinet, with the addition of such high officers of the Navy, Army and (since 1919) Air Force as seems desirable, under the presidency of the Prime Minister.¹

¹ See "1914" Vol. II., pp. 10-11.

It had been assumed that unified command in a major war would be exercised by a small committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff ; but a " War " Council " of larger dimensions was formed : later a " War " Committee of the Cabinet ", with reduced numbers, took its place ; and eventually, on the 9th December 1916, two days after Mr. Lloyd George had become Prime Minister, this was still further reduced in numbers—for, as he said, " you cannot wage war with a Sanhedrin "—and renamed the " War Cabinet ", which continued in superior control of the direction of the forces of the British Empire in war until the Armistice. When it did come to a decision there was no appeal from it to any other body. Assisted by its constitutional advisers, the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the War Cabinet was responsible for the distribution between the various theatres of the fighting forces of the Crown, including those placed at the disposal of the Empire by the Dominions and India, as well as of the workers and material provided under the direction of the Cabinet by the various Ministries. It also conducted, often by means of conferences, the important negotiations with the Allied Governments which became necessary in a Coalition War.

Mr. Asquith had been content to leave matters in the hands of his constitutional professional advisers, giving them unstinted support. When Mr. Lloyd George displaced him, the War had lasted over two years ; the battles of Verdun and the Somme in 1916 had cost the French and British forces heavy casualties, without, as it seemed at the time, doing much towards the final defeat of the Germans. On the 12th December 1916, almost simultaneously with Mr. Lloyd George's accession to power, the French Government, under M. Briand, for political reasons, removed General Joffre from the command of the French Armies, and with him disappeared the co-ordinating power over the operations of the Allied land forces which he had by his own personality as well as by force of circumstances most successfully established, if less successfully applied.

Mr. Lloyd George had never been a " Westerner " since that term had been invented. The possibility of decisive success on the Western Front was to him doubtful, and could, in any case, only be bought at very high cost in life. He was in favour of trying a main operation in some other theatre : via the Balkans against Austria, via Palestine

against Turkey, and, as he said, "knocking away Germany's "props", although Germany herself regarded her Allies in a somewhat different light. As General von Gallwitz has told us, she was thankful that the forces of the British Empire were dissipated in minor theatres.¹ Another authoritative German writer has pointed out that Germany, being on interior lines, could send troops faster and in greater numbers to any theatre in Europe, and parts of Asia, where forces of the Entente might appear, and that, wherever that was, there would be heavy fighting.² This was undoubtedly the case. Besides, at no time, certainly not at the beginning of 1917, was there any chance of persuading the French to an important adventure—the Salonika expedition remained a strictly limited affair—outside the main theatre.

Before Mr. Lloyd George had become Prime Minister or Joffre been removed, plans had been made for continuing the Somme offensive. Apart from other reasons, the enemy was on French soil, and his expulsion was a matter of prime importance. It might be added that the possession of the Channel ports was not without value to the British cause, so the Flanders front could not be left lightly guarded during an offensive in some other theatre. General Nivelle, Joffre's successor, had promised an easy, cheap and certain success on the Western Front in a sector other than the Somme. Mr. Lloyd George was converted for a time to this view, and to achieve the desired end did his best to place Sir Douglas Haig and the British Armies in France under the French general's orders. Sir Douglas Haig fulfilled his share of the offensive at Arras, but Nivelle's failure to do more than gain a little ground—rather less than other planned offensives had done and at very heavy cost both in blood and morale—crushed for the time any idea of a unified command. The success of the German U-boat warfare, however, led the conference of French and British statesmen, seamen and soldiers, which sat in Paris on the 5th-7th May 1917, to discuss a course of action and to decide unanimously that it was "indispensable to continue offensive "operations on the Western Front", Mr. Lloyd George

¹ In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* of 20th July 1936, he wrote: "We Germans were grateful that very strong English contingents—about 26 divisions—were chained to other theatres of war, especially in the East. The battles there did not burden us anything like as much as a large-scale transfer of British divisions to the Western Front would have done."

² M.W.B. Nos. 30, 31 and 32 of 1935. For a comparison of the speed of railway and sea transport, see "1916" Vol. I., p. 7.

urging extreme intensity of action throughout the whole summer. It was obvious that if it were impossible to close the Straits of Dover to enemy craft when the Allies held both sides, though the passage was rendered difficult and dangerous, the loss of one side might be fatal to communications between England and France. The mutinies in the French Army, and the slackening of the Russian effort as a result of revolution, led both the British and French Governments to envisage the cessation of offensive operations in order to save men and resources for a final effort in 1918 in conjunction with the American Army, which it was hoped would have arrived by that time. But no order was given to Sir Douglas Haig to stop his offensive, and he was allowed, with Government approval, to proceed with his operations, Messines and "Passchendaele".

The very heavy losses incurred in the latter campaign and the continuation of the operations into October and November under appalling conditions of rain and mud, led the Prime Minister, though steadfast in his determination to win the War, to lose faith, never apparently very strong, in his constitutional military advisers, and to revert to schemes for a campaign elsewhere than on the Western Front. But he still gave no direct order to the Commander-in-Chief to desist from offensive action on the Western Front, although he went for advice to Field-Marshal Lord French and General Sir Henry Wilson, who were then holding commands in the United Kingdom. The Supreme War Council of Versailles, with its Military Representatives, instituted on the 7th November 1917, seemed to provide a means of overriding his constitutional advisers. In the difficulties which arose in adjusting the relative positions of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the British representative for the Executive War Board, the Prime Minister, as was his right, seized the opportunity to appoint Sir Henry Wilson, who seemed inclined to support his own views as to war policy but was distrusted by the higher ranks of the Army, to be C.I.G.S. in place of Sir William Robertson, who was opposed to action except on the Western Front.

He considered the expediency of removing Sir Douglas Haig, but this was another matter. He knew that public opinion and the feelings of the Army would be against such a course, and in vain sought the support of the Prime Ministers of the Dominion of Canada and the Commonwealth of Australia. To find a successor was difficult,

"not one of the visible military leaders would have been "any better".¹ The Army cared not when Field-Marshal Sir John French and General Robertson were removed, but it had extraordinary faith and confidence in Haig, and his supersession, even if he had been succeeded by Sir Herbert Plumer, might well have destroyed its faith in itself and in ultimate victory.

Circumstances then combined to prevent there being much prospect of the Commander-in-Chief embarking on another offensive in France, or of troops being available for an eccentric campaign elsewhere. First he was ordered to send five divisions to Italy; secondly, the Armies in France were below strength, some 75,000 infantry short in the British divisions at the beginning of November 1917, and the Army Council had not sufficient trained drafts of military age at their disposal to make good this number. There was a great lack, too, of labour for work on defences and on roads, hutments and other services behind the lines. The Ministry of National Service was not prepared to find the men, and it appeared that of the 615,000 trained reinforcements required, as far as could be foreseen, by the British Armies in France for the year 1918, the Ministry, which had to allocate men for the Navy, munitions works, utility services, agriculture, etc., would not make more than 100,000 available. As matters turned out, 544,005 men were sent to France between the 21st March and the end of August 1918,² besides, under the stress of emergency, another 100,000 collected from Italy, Salonika and Palestine. It is obvious, therefore, that the shortage, or a large part of it, could have been met by the War Cabinet had it so wished. If, indeed, Haig had wasted life at Passchendaele in 1917, and might do the same again if given sufficient troops, such a consideration was no reason for placing the Allied cause in jeopardy in 1918.

The War Cabinet, in spite of the protests of the Army Council, decided not only not to provide the reinforcements demanded, but also, in view of the reduced number of infantry soldiers, to order the reorganization of the British divisions in France on a reduced scale of nine infantry battalions, instead of twelve.³ The Dominions, being free to do so, declined to make such a change. Apart from fear of another Passchendaele offensive, the Prime Minister

¹ Mr. Lloyd George, "War Memoirs" iv., pp. 2265-8.

² See "1918" Vol. I., p. 52.

³ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 51.

had always regarded the Western Front as "over-insured", forgetful of the fact that the British Armies were improvised and inferior to the German in fire power (guns, trench mortars and machine-guns) as well as in training, and that French and British divisions, owing to differences of armament and rationing, were not homogeneous or readily adapted to reinforce each other, even if so disposed. It would appear, also, that he feared to make the necessary further demands on organized labour. Little did he know the English and Scots in times of national emergency if he seriously thought they would meet such demands by strikes. In the midst of the battle, on the 26th March, the Labour Party sent a telegram of encouragement and congratulation to Sir Douglas Haig, "soldiers and comrades". What the nation wanted was a lead.

The civilians who made the very important decision to reorganize the divisions on a nine-battalion basis, at such a moment, cannot have understood the temporary disorganization which it would entail, the effect on morale of breaking up established ties, and the confusion into which such a change in the number of tactical units to be handled by division and brigade would plunge the improvised staffs, only recently initiated in the art of dealing with troops. In itself, the reduction of the infantry of divisions was a proper step, but in face of a probable German attack, Sir Douglas Haig informed the War Cabinet that the reorganization involved "grave dangers". Such a reduction of infantry had been recommended for the French Armies by General Joffre in August 1916, and gradually carried out; but at the same time he had also recommended the increase of the artillery of each division by two groups of 6-inch howitzers.¹ The Germans had carried out an identical reduction earlier, between the 1st February and 31st December 1915, but, on the other hand, had greatly increased the number of machine guns, giving each battalion six and then 12, instead of two machine guns. There was no such compensation for the British by increase in fire power—the Lewis gun was little more than a cumbrous, heavy and not too reliable automatic rifle—in fact, the fire power of infantry battalions and brigades had just been lessened by the reorganization of the machine-gun companies into divisional battalions. With the enemy offensive threaten-

¹ According to the French Order of Battle in F.O.A. ix. (ii.), the reduced divisions at once received an additional group of field artillery, but only one group of 155 mm. (6-inch) howitzers.

ing, the date, the 10th January 1918, selected for the inauguration of the change from twelve to nine battalions per division was inopportune, indeed disastrous. It has been shown that the transformation was no simple affair but meant considerable internal reorganization, absorbing several weeks which should have been utilized to improve the defences. In fact, the reorganization was not completed until the 4th March, less than three weeks before the Germans struck.¹

Thus whilst the German staffs and troops were being put through special training for the offensive, the British, who required not only much more training and preparation, but also time and labour to complete their defences, were prevented from getting on with this essential task.

Whilst refusing to bring the Armies up to establishment, the War Cabinet agreed to the French proposal that the British should take over more of the front. As a political question between the Allies, and in view of the internal situation in France, it was again quite reasonable that the British should hold more of the front than they did; from first to last the average Frenchman thought that they were never pulling their weight. But without provision of additional troops for the purpose, the arrangement dangerously weakened the line, and prevented the formation of substantial reserves, indispensable both in offence and defence. The British Commander-in-Chief was not present at the conference at which the Government agreed "in principle" to the extension of the British front, nor was he consulted as to the matter. When it was communicated to him, he wrote a letter protesting strongly against the decision being taken without reference to him. On the 22nd December, he wrote, for the information of the War Cabinet, that in the event of such an extension, he "could not undertake the responsibility for the defence of the Channel ports". On the 4th January 1918, after the decision with regard to the reduction of the strength of divisions had been notified to him, he recommended the War Cabinet to refuse to agree to the proposed extension, and requested that he might "be relieved of responsibility for any unfortunate results which may follow if my recommendation is not accepted". The French were fully aware of Sir Douglas Haig's reasoned objections. The French official history states : ²

¹ See "1918" Vol. I., pp. 54-5.

² F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 28.

“Dès le début de l’offensive allemande en Italie [24th October 1917], le maréchal Haig ne cachait pas, en effet, sa vive répugnance à étendre désormais sa droite pour nous relever. . . . Il fallait les plus vives instances du général en chef [Pétain] pour obtenir, à la fin du mois, la promesse que la relève de notre gauche s’effectuerait à partir du 12 décembre.”

There was a “*crise des effectifs*” also in France, and General Pétain had demanded of his Government that the 1919 Class should be called up, and that no more reinforcements should be sent to Italy or the Near East, and proposed to disband three divisions.¹

Not only were the British forced to take over more front, but the front in question was, as regards defences, in a poor state, and required much labour to be expended on it. It was not the fault of General Gough or the Fifth Army that this labour was not available.²

Thus by the will of the War Cabinet the British Armies in France were left without the reinforcements due, and, notwithstanding this, had been forced to take over more front, and that front in a neglected condition.

The remedy proposed by the Supreme War Council—which had given its benediction to the extension of the line—was the formation of a General Reserve. This again was perfectly reasonable, indeed not only a necessary but an imperative measure. But the Council did not provide the reserve. By bringing back divisions—as was done after the calamity of the 21st March—from Italy, Salonika and Palestine, and sending out garrison divisions from the United Kingdom, this might have been done. It was proposed to take 12 divisions from the Italian front for the purpose; actually, before the 21st March, only one division was brought from this theatre. To find the remainder, the Council’s programme was to call for nine or ten from the French Armies and seven or six from the British. Neither Pétain nor Haig would admit that he had any to spare. Ignoring cavalry, the former, with a

¹ F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 183.

² A Frenchman, M. Paul Maze, writes in “A Frenchman in Khaki”, p. 265, that “the sectors taken over had been quiet fronts, and were in a neglected state. A tenant who knows that his lease is up does not bother to repaint his house or install more bathrooms, and so the French Third Army had left the line with little evidence of defensive preparations for their successors—all the work remained for the Fifth Army to do.”

It will be seen in later volumes that when the Allies had broken through the defences that the Germans had spent years in perfecting, their rapidly constructed new lines did not give much trouble.

total of 102 divisions, had 24 in Army and Group of Armies reserve, at the disposal of G.Q.G., and 16 directly under G.Q.G.; the latter, with a vitally important sector of the front, had 58 divisions, of which 40 were in the line, five in corps reserve, five in Army reserve and eight in G.H.Q. reserve.¹ As it was not certain where the enemy would attack, and the repulse of the attack would depend almost entirely on the rapid appearance of reserves in sufficient quantity—for it had become an established fact that an attacker after careful preparation could always gain a certain amount of ground at the outset—the two Commanders-in-Chief were pledged to support each other. In total, the combined reserves were sufficient to deal with most situations, but not with the addition of fifty divisions to the German reserves in the West. The answer to that was the despatch to France of all formations possible from England and the “side shows”. Both Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson had urged this, but it was not done. Mr. Lloyd George had declared the appointment of a Generalissimo was impracticable, so machinery for the proper application of reserves was lacking, but this the Supreme War Council could have provided. It did not exercise command itself, indeed renounced such function, but appointed an Executive War Board. This did nothing; did not even prepare to take charge of reserves. Had a General Reserve been provided, the Board might well have appointed General Gouraud, who had the confidence of both French and British, to the administrative if not the executive command of it, and put the two Commanders-in-Chief in direct communication with him.

The Germans were making preparations for the offensive on practically the whole of their front from St. Mihiel to the sea, and at one place, near Strasbourg, in the Alsace-Lorraine section.² It was only gradually, and on the 10th March, that the Intelligence Section of G.H.Q. came to the conclusion that an “offensive in the Arras—St. Quentin “area” was imminent, with “a minor offensive in the “sector south of St. Quentin”, and that other preparations

¹ For comparison with the French, the British corps reserves must be omitted, as the French corps reserves are not accurately known (about one or more infantry regiments in each corps, making a total equivalent in infantry of about 15 divisions). Thus, against the British reserve of 13 divisions out of 58 divisions, the French had 40 out of 102, that is 1 in 2.6 against the British 1 in 4.4. If the corps reserves are added, the proportions become, French 1 in 1.8 to the British 1 in 3.2.

² See Sketch 6 in “1918” Vol. I.

on the British fronts were feints "with the object of retaining reserves".¹ This, as we now know, was quite correct: the German *Eighteenth Army*, extended from La Fère to just north of St. Quentin, was in the first place intended to make only a subsidiary attack and act as flank guard along the Crozat canal and the Somme—a fact often forgotten in considering the March offensive. The right of the original attack did not quite reach as far as Arras, but on the 28th March it was extended to include the Arras sector.

In his heart Sir Douglas Haig regarded an offensive or offensives as the proper reply to the German menace. Even a small local attack might have deranged the German plans. He was driven, by lack of means, to stand on the absolute defensive without adequate reserves. The strategic distribution of the forces at his disposal, made on common-sense principles, was the best suited to meet the situation, into which he had been forced, as it gradually developed. His line was strong on the left and in the centre, and weak on the right. His reasons have been set forth at length in the previous volume.² Shortly, they are that, north of the Scarpe, the front line lay only just fifty miles from the Channel coast, and he could not afford to give ground; south of the Scarpe there was some room for manoeuvre, and the French assistance might be expected without unreasonable delay. There was, finally, a reserve of two divisions and a cavalry division behind the French left, and five divisions and two cavalry divisions covering Paris which seemed immediately available. As it turned out Pétain preferred to bring divisions from more distant quarters, rather than use those covering Paris.³ The British Commander-in-Chief divided his own reserve between the four Armies, giving two divisions to each; but arrangements were made for shifting them rapidly by rail, and the four in the north (the 8th and 35th from the Second Army, and the 31st and 42nd from the First Army) were, soon after the battle opened on the 21st, ordered to the Fifth and Third Armies.

The retention of the Flesquières Salient by the Third

¹ See the Summaries of Intelligence of 10th and 17th March, quoted in "1918" Vol. I., pp. 106-7.

² See "1918" Vol. I., pp. 91-4.

³ To assist the Fifth Army, there arrived on 22nd March, one French division; on the 23rd, three (one a dismounted cavalry division); on the 24th, three; on the 25th, three; and on the 26th, parts of two others and two cavalry divisions (see "1918" Vol. I., p. 549).

Army was a mistake; it led to the useless sacrifice of a great proportion of the infantry of the 2nd Division and part of that of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, when the enemy shelled the salient with mustard gas¹—the loss, one may say, of a division. This later caused serious difficulties, from consequent lack of reserves, at the junction of the Fifth and Third Armies. A memorandum from G.H.Q. had laid down that salients could not be held in a defensive battle; special instructions were issued on the 14th December that the base of the salient should be approximately the front of the Battle Zone; and on the 10th March, Sir Douglas Haig again instructed the Third Army that the salient "was only to be held as a false front, "in sufficient strength to check raids".²

French G.Q.G. regarded an offensive in Champagne (the German "Roland" and "Achilles" plans) as most probable, with perhaps an advance through Switzerland—an operation which G.H.Q. regarded as "inherently improbable"—and General Pétain had disposed most of his reserves to be ready for these two eventualities, 17 divisions between St. Mihiel and Soissons, and 15 southwards of St. Mihiel, including five on the extreme right near Belfort.³ He was, to some extent, supported in his views by the experts of the Supreme War Council, who anticipated that the Germans, dividing their forces, would make two offensives: one in Champagne with 96 divisions, and another, with 96 divisions, on the front Cambrai—Arras—La Bassée canal. Pétain's belief in the impending attack in Champagne was duly confirmed when, on the 20th March, in order to deceive him, the enemy loosed a captive balloon to drift over to the French lines, its car containing notes on the great attack to be delivered against the sector on the 26th.⁴ The Chief of the Staff of the German *Eighteenth Army* had written in February: "It need not be anticipated that the French will run themselves off their legs and hurry at once to the help of their Entente comrades"; and this proved to be the case.⁵

¹ Over 7,000 gas casualties. See for details "1918" Vol. I., p. 181, f.n. 2, and p. 247.

² See "1918" Vol. I., p. 115.

³ F.O.A. vi. (i.), Carte No. 2. The summary in the French text, p. 228 (quoted in "1918" Vol. I., p. 117, f.n. 2), does not quite agree with the maps.

⁴ F.O.A. vi. (i.), pp. 250-1. Another trick, which has only recently come to notice, is recorded in Walter Bloem's "Das Ganze halt", p. 245: every house in the Champagne area was prepared for the reception of troops, French carpenters being employed to erect tiers of wooden sleeping berths in them.

⁵ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 145.

Whether reinforcements would have been sent more rapidly had there been a General Reserve, under the control of the Supreme War Council, must remain an open question. As the Executive War Board depended on information obtained from the Commanders-in-Chief of the two Allied Armies and expected simultaneous attacks on the French and British, there seems no reason to believe that it would have acted with greater speed. The procedure at Versailles was very slow: there was much debating between the 7th November and the 21st March, but few decisions were made. It required from the 7th November to the 2nd February to reach the decision that the British should take over more front. The "Military Representatives" never produced their "recommendations as to the future plans of operations", which they had been asked on the 7th November to supply. Yet time pressed and a crisis was close at hand. This dilatory performance of their duties does not seem to suggest that either the Council or its Board would have sent reinforcements even as expeditiously as General Pétain did.

The tactical distribution of the British troops was in accordance with a scheme of Zones, copied from the Germans, who certainly possessed considerable experience in defence; but the essential feature of the German system, the counter-attack (*Eingreif*) divisions, close at hand, ready to strike the enemy at once should he overwhelm the forward troops, was absent for the very good reason that Haig had not the men. The new arrangement was, however, mainly a question of nomenclature and elaboration of existing defences, not of organic change. Hitherto the British had fought in "lines" with subsidiary additions in depth. The front line, with its support and reserve trenches, strongpoints and switches, became on the maps of the higher staffs, the Forward Zone. The "Corps Line" became the front line of the Battle Zone, the "Army Line", its rear line; to complete this Zone, intermediate defences had to be provided. The entire Rear Zone (Green Line) had still to be constructed. For the new work there was little time, while very little labour was forthcoming: the elderly men, Italians, Chinese and other non-combatants, who did good work in back areas on roads, hutting, water supply and such like, could not be kept in the front areas, sleeping in the open in the months of February and March; there was not enough transport to carry them to and from

work; and the foreigners had not engaged to do work in the shelled areas. The bulk of the labour had to be provided by the fighting troops, and this interfered with the short period which was available for proper training and rest.

Thus the defences could not be elaborated in depth up to the enemy's standard; while in the area newly taken over from the French they were most distinctly weak. Owing to lack of time and man-power, in the Fifth Army particularly, recourse was had to the construction of strong-points and machine-gun nests, and to the defence of the line, not by a continuous front of fire, the long-established British custom, but by cross-fire. Such a disposition was only the beginning, the framework, of a system. As a preliminary measure for defence of the front in ordinary times, the cross-fire system was excellent: its weakness, particularly in bad weather—quite apart from the British soldier's aversion to fighting in "bird cages" marked down for bombardment by the enemy—was recognized. But there was little alternative in the Fifth Army area: if there were time, and more troops arrived, the strongpoints could be joined up by fire trenches. Deep dug-outs and reasonable shelter from heavy howitzer fire, and, above all, "switches", such as had been provided in the course of months and years for the German front, by which the damage likely to follow an enemy entry can be limited, were conspicuously lacking.

Readers will have noticed the contrast between the fighting in the Fifth Army on the 21st March, when the 14th and 18th Divisions were overrun and pushed back through the Forward and Battle Zones, and the fighting at the junction of the Third and First Armies on the 28th March in front of Arras, where, in spite of a severe initial bombardment, the enemy—who had not the numerical superiority he put into the field against the Fifth Army on the 21st March¹—suffered from the 3rd, 15th, 4th and 56th Divisions one of the worst checks which he had ever experienced, and failed to carry even the Forward Zone at the first rush. Still more striking was the defence of the Givenchy sector by the 55th Division on the 9th April and subsequent days; it seems unlikely that the enemy would have had any such success as he did in the Lys offensive had not the Portuguese 2nd Division given way and left a large gap in the front. On the first occasion, there were improvised defences, manned by a weak garrison disposed largely in strong-

¹ On the 21st March 40 divisions against 11½ (north of the Oise); on the 28th, 9 against 4.

points without switches: on the other two, there were good, well-established British trenches and switches; these were not without strongpoints, and were provided with effective dug-outs; more important still, there had been time to train the garrisons in their duties, while there were reserves detailed for immediate counter-attack, equally instructed when and where to act. The fog which prevailed on the 21st March contributed, without a doubt, to accentuate the weakness of a system of defence by cross-fire against a really heavy attack; it led, as obscurity continued, to the garrison of the front line being left in the morning as strong as it had been during the night, presenting, after dawn, a finer target than was usual, and weakening in consequence the available reserves.

As experience was gained the front defences were thinned so as to escape the effects of the bombardment, until they became a mere outpost line, and one of the rearward systems provided the line of resistance.¹ It is easy to be wise after the event: on the 21st March no French or British soldier foresaw the nature and intensity of the impending German bombardment, while its short duration allowed no time for adjustments to lessen its effects.

The defenders of isolated strongpoints, however gallantly they held out, were bound in the end—like beleaguered fortresses—to be captured unless relieved by counter-attacks. Lack of troops on the 21st March stood in the way of a sufficient number being retained for either immediate lesser local or methodical large-scale counter-attacks. Lack of troops, too, prevented the rear systems and lines from being properly manned; and long experience has shown that it is not enough to dig a rear line or back trench; the bulk of the retiring troops will, as a rule pass over it unless there are defenders already in it. The initial difficulties of the British in 1918 must, then, be attributed to an extended front with too few troops to defend it in depth, but the crisis was occasioned by lack of reserves.

The British Armies of 1918 were improvised Armies with improvised staffs, improvised regimental cadres and

¹ On 27th May, in the Chemin des Dames battle, the line of resistance of the French was the front line; on the 9th June, at the Matz, it was the reserve line of the front position; on 15th July, in the Second Battle of the Marne, it was still farther back, the intermediate line, between the first and second positions: in theory, Pétain preferred the second position. The Germans had reached this conclusion during the Passchendaele battles, after the disasters of the 26th September and 4th October, 1917.

improvised soldiers. Never fully trained even in the offensive, the troops had received too little training in defence ; and none in retreat, which, of all operations, requires most skill from staffs and troops. On the subject of retirement there was neither a manual nor a doctrine. Nor had any preparation been made for a deep withdrawal beyond the tracing of a Green Line and a Péronne bridgehead, and the mention of certain lines as suitable for resistance. A hundred years ago a retreat was comparatively easy to stage manage : one forced the pursuing enemy to deploy and then withdrew to another position where the process could be repeated. Now the theory of retreat is to fight rearguard actions by day, to hold the enemy off with the long-range weapons, withdrawing by echelons in good time, in order to avoid being attacked at close quarters—"pour éviter l'abordage" as it is neatly put in French—and, in any case, slipping back at night a few miles to a new position. The difficulty is to select the moment to slip off, neither too soon nor too late ; for the enemy, lying down or under cover, does not show his strength, as he did in the old days of short-range warfare.

Actually, very small bodies, by infiltration, brought about retirements, as we have seen. On the other hand, the New Armies, in their valour, very often held on too long ; but, accustomed to fight in line, they tried to retire in line, and were in the highest degree sensitive with regard to their flanks, a fact which was only too well exploited by the enemy. Lack of appreciation of the necessity of strengthening the flanks of gaps made by small local penetrations was responsible for many withdrawals from tactical points the possession of which was essential to prevent the continuation of his advance. Too much reliance was placed on maintaining a continuous line at the expense of the true principles of the use of ground. To swing back a defensive flank, as was so often done, was only a temporary palliative, as that flank itself was bound to be turned soon, unless there were supports and reserves behind the gap in the line. Echeloned flanks would as a rule, have yielded better results. In the Lys fighting in April, reserves, if only in small numbers, were available, and, in spite of the gap left by the Portuguese, a defensive line was formed and maintained. As fresh reserve divisions came up, notably when the 1st Australian and 5th Divisions arrived, the enemy was brought to a standstill. Such reserves were lacking in March in the

Fifth Army, and only gradually became available in the Third Army. No sooner did they make themselves felt than the German advance, hampered by fatigue of the troops and difficulties of supply, instantly came to an end. The loss of ground need neither have been so rapid nor so great had reserves been forthcoming; without them there was no alternative but to fight rearguard actions to avoid destruction until the French arrived. One hardly likes to contemplate what might have happened had the Germans pushed up masses of cavalry or mechanized forces to exploit their early success. In future, it would seem that improvised Armies will have little chance, even if there is time to create them, against an enemy who is in possession of aeroplanes, tanks, armoured cars and mechanized troops to exploit a gap, or even, judging from more recent events in Abyssinia, of aeroplanes alone.

The wisdom of trying to defend a river line, though it apparently offers advantages, especially against a motorized enemy, appears very doubtful. Very early on in the War, the French were unable to hold the Meuse line. The enemy, by concentrating artillery at one or more places, can, as a rule, force a passage, just as he can break into an entrenched position, and the line being turned on either side of the place of entry, the defenders must go or be rolled up.

It has been held by authority that there are dangers in training troops in retreat, as it disposes them to retire. It is time that retirement should be recognized as a definite means of leading the enemy into a trap.¹ It must, however, be admitted that a previous mention of the well-marked line of the Crozat canal and the Somme, as a possible position on which the main resistance should be offered,² led to an over-hasty movement back to it on the 22nd/23rd March by the XVIII. Corps and part of the III. Corps. The possibility of the Third Army retiring north-westwards, also only hinted at in a warning order,³ brought

¹ According to plan, in August 1914, the German *Sixth* and *Seventh Armies* should have fallen back and led the French into a "sack". The retirement was actually begun, but stopped on account of the early successes which the right wing had gained over the French.

In the manoeuvres of 1913, the 4th Division, under Major-General T. D'O. Snow, with which the compiler was then serving, carried out a retreat in darkness and rain, and in March 1914 it had a divisional staff exercise to study the conduct of a retreat, not only without damage to morale, but with great profit, as it found a few months later.

² See "1918" Vol. I., p. 97.

³ See "1918" Vol. I., p. 508.

about the unfortunate wheel back of the VII. Corps on the 26th. With well-trained staffs such unintended and premature movements are unlikely to occur.

The generals and staffs, and the greatly expanded signal service, had learnt to control the machinery of command only in sedentary warfare, and once the retreat began, with the exception of the infantry brigadiers and their staff officers, higher authorities could, as a rule, exercise little control; their headquarters in trench warfare had been well back, with good telephone communications, and, in consequence, they had become accustomed to command from a distance. With notable exceptions, they at first continued this practice. It was unsuited to a retreat, when the place of the commanders should be even nearer the enemy than in an advance, and much nearer than in trench warfare. Before orders could be issued or information got back, the situation to which they applied had, as a rule, changed. That, on the whole, a better fight was put up on the Lys than on the Somme was due partly perhaps to the attacking German divisions not being so highly trained, and to the difficulties of the ground which they had to cross, but partly also to the fact that a considerable proportion of the defending troops had gained experience in the earlier fighting, and the higher staffs kept closer touch with the front. In March, reserve troops and rear lines, by which commanders can restore a situation, were few and sketchy; in April, they were generally available. Liaison was to some extent kept by officers on horses or in cars. Yet it remains a marvel, in the circumstances, that such a fine resistance was put up by the Fifth Army and so good a line maintained, and little wonder that the retirements were so long, often too long, delayed, and then were hurried and carried too far. The direction, throughout, was largely left in the hands of brigadiers and colonels, who had of course no more than a local outlook. Such incidents as the loss of Ham, in the XVIII. Corps line, which enabled the line of the Somme to be turned, and the failure to foresee and stop the crossing of the Somme in the area prematurely abandoned by the Third Army, which led to the Germans forcing their way to Lamotte, behind the left of the XIX. Corps, were due to what must be called "bad staff work". It must not be overlooked, however, that few of the junior staff officers, hastily put through a "learner's course" of one kind only of staff work, could render the assistance expected of their appointments: none possessed experience

of open warfare ; many, it has been stated by overworked seniors, could not write a comprehensible field message, far less a practical operation order : they were not in a position to represent their chief when they visited a unit. In a word their lack of training threw a heavy burden on the few really competent staff officers, who were obliged to work to the point of exhaustion.

Staff direction was, however, properly applied to keeping the roads clear, getting up ammunition and supplies, and withdrawing the heavy artillery, removing or destroying stores, evacuating wounded and rallying stragglers. All these duties were successfully accomplished, although supply was very much complicated by the mix-up of divisions. Otherwise there was little provision against what the enemy was most likely to do next.

Of the valour of the troops there is no question. The old adage, that the British fight best in a tight place, was once more indisputably proved, and in no short and passing trial. One may quote the verdict of a Frenchman who saw them : " All that remained of the Fifth Army were men " whose bodies were tired out, but whose spirits were unbroken. Not one of them looked upon himself as a " beaten man." ¹ Their fatigue, too, passed after a few days' rest ; for sleep is of more importance than plentiful food to the very young soldier, and at the front bombing and shelling and constant calls to stand-to prevented sleep. Of the divisions which fought in the Fifth Army in March, omitting mention of the Third, the 8th, 9th, 18th, 21st, 24th, 30th, 36th, 58th and 61st fought again in other Armies in April on the Lys or at Villers Bretonneux. It was the unconquerable British soldier who averted defeat.

The test imposed on the Armies of 1918 was far more severe than on the B.E.F. when in retreat to the Seine in 1914. The number of days of retreat in March and again in April was much about the same, but in 1914, although the weather was very hot and the distances were longer, there was not the severe and practically continuous fighting : except on the 23rd, 24th, 26th, 27th August and the 1st September 1914, there was indeed little contact with the enemy. Instead of a couple of afternoon fights, with an interval of a whole day, as in the Waterloo campaign, the troops in 1918 fought, marched and dug, practically continuously day by day for eleven days in March, and then for a good part of April. There were so many Hougomonts

¹ " A Frenchman in Khaki ", by Paul Maze.

that they cannot even all be mentioned ; and, if exception be made of the cavalry and a few Regular battalions of the old Army, they were held, not by professional soldiers, but by amateurs, who had never prepared themselves for such an ordeal.

When the Germans seemed to be sweeping all before them, it is questionable whether a single British soldier even entertained a thought of the possibility of ultimate defeat. There might be, to use the South African phrase of 1899, " regrettable incidents ", set-backs, even disasters, but it was everybody's fixed conviction that the Germans would, some day or other, collapse, and that the Empire would somehow or other muddle through to victory.

Not many shirkers were to be found in the fighting ranks. The majority of the men in uniform who drifted back, spreading alarm and despondency in the back areas, belonged to small parties engaged on administrative, one might say on " domestic " duties, in areas which had to be abandoned ; on railways and canals ; on road repairs and water points ; at dumps, canteens and staging areas (sanitary and fatigue men). Their " homes " having been overrun, they did not know where to go ; but they should have been assembled by their officers and marched to the rear in formed columns, when the sight of them would not have caused alarm or even notice. Had they been trained soldiers, they could have been armed and used in the defences.

Many stragglers certainly drifted away from their units, and parties which had lost their officers were as sheep without a shepherd. Some of these attached themselves to other units ; others continued until stopped by officers detailed to collect stragglers. Some men dropped and fell asleep from pure fatigue and were thus captured. Of the majority, it may be said that they declined to show their backs to the Germans, and that they only required to be told when and where to fight. Senior regimental officers could not be everywhere, and many of the junior regimental ranks, though full of courage, from lack of experience had little idea of leadership or of looking after their men in open warfare ; but they quickly learnt. Armies which offer resistance by untrained individual effort cannot hope to do as well as those in which, under perfect control, every man is trained to play his particular rôle.

The cavalry, acting as mounted infantry, achieved wonders in blocking holes in the line. The engineers and

pioneers dug by night and fought as infantry by day, rendering invaluable service in counter-attack and in covering the retreat of other troops. The machine gunners were everywhere, and contributed to every German repulse. The tanks, employed in small detachments, gave help unstintedly, though they could do nothing decisive, and each engagement of them meant that a very considerable proportion were destroyed or had to be abandoned; their crews then fought as machine gunners. On every day the air force fought to help the infantry, and the boldness of the aviators undoubtedly prevented the enemy's airmen from taking advantage of the opportunities which a retreat offers for bombing transport on the roads. Far too little has been said about the share of the artillery, especially of the horse and field artillery, not only in offering resistance but in forming the framework of the battle. Working as the batteries did in small groups, even isolated, it has been found impossible to give them more than general mention. From the breakdown of the means of communication with the observers in aeroplanes, the longer range artillery could not play the part it did in trench warfare, but German accounts show the devastating effect of its fire on the roads and communications. Only in 1917 when, at last, a supply of good ammunition was flowing freely from England, did the fight for artillery domination begin in earnest. In 1918 it resulted in the British obtaining and keeping the upper hand.

In March, General Pétain and Sir Douglas Haig had made reasonable provision on paper for mutual assistance. But nothing seems to have been arranged to ensure that the French divisions should move up quickly; and all, except the 125th, came up piecemeal, without artillery, ammunition supply, or field kitchens and other transport, even without officers' chargers. The 125th Division soon ran out of ammunition. As there was no supreme commander, it would, in the circumstances, probably have been expedient for the Supreme War Council to have ordered the troops near the boundary to be organized as an "international force". This had been done at the Somme in 1916 and continued to be practised on a small scale, *e.g.*, on the 30th April. Unfortunately, the right wing of the Fifth Army (III. Corps, less part of the 58th Division on the extreme right, and XVIII. Corps) fell back quickly, and the French arrived slowly and were immediately driven

back. Instead of attacking the exposed left flank of Hutier's advancing troops, on the northern side of the Oise, our Allies allowed themselves to be bluffed and did not manage to retain even a bridgehead on that river. Had the French infantry been placed *under* the British as it came up, it would have been used definitely to reinforce under the command of the generals already in action.

As it was, the French generals invariably took charge the moment they arrived, not knowing the ground, and—as may be seen from the orders which they issued—not having grasped the situation. They did very little either to reinforce the Fifth Army or stem the German advance westward. Finally when the British were driven back pivoting on Arras, the French, retaining the three divisions of the British III. Corps, formed a front facing not east, but north, between the original right of the Fifth Army near La Fère and its various positions back to Moreuil. Thus at the end, to put it simply, instead of the British Fifth and Third Armies holding the base of a triangle, La Fère—Arras, they held one side, Moreuil—Arras, while the French occupied the other side, La Fère—Moreuil, with the Germans in the angle. An advance northwards of the French, who by the 1st April had brought up 32 divisions, would have relieved pressure on the British, and greatly embarrassed the Germans. But by that time such an advance was barred by the German *Eighteenth Army*, the flank guard, and the French, forgetting that trench warfare had for a time ceased, treated this Army with too great respect. It was, at any rate, held, and the many divisions it contained could not be turned against the British.

The appointment of General Foch to co-ordinate and control the Allied efforts prevented the disaster of the separation of the two Armies. It brought to an end the unspoken, invisible conflict between the two Commanders-in-Chief which had gone on since Haig had been forced to take over the front of the French Third Army with his Fifth Army. One feels at the back of one's mind that he was determined the French should take back this front, and that Pétain was equally determined that he would not do so. Certain new difficulties at once arose when Foch took charge, as he was not accustomed to command British troops; nor were British generals accustomed to receive the kind of directives and orders which he issued. There should have been British staff officers on his staff to "interpret" him. When he ordered the British not to give

up an inch of ground, they stuck to their positions until he himself released them—as the XIX. Corps did on the 27th March—regardless that by so doing they might be annihilated. French generals, on the other hand, felt themselves entitled by custom to use their discretion in executing orders given by superior officers not in close touch with local conditions. The phrases which Foch seems to have been accustomed to use to encourage French generals, when addressed to Generals Gough and Rawlinson merely filled them with amazement as seeming to indicate a lack of appreciation of the situation and by no means brought about ready and willing obedience. A close study of the methods of possible Allies is in the highest degree necessary for intelligent and smooth co-operation.

Professing the strongest belief, which was not unjustified, in the tenacity of the British troops against any odds, and at the same time doubtful as to the offensive powers of the French infantry, General Foch in April declined to direct General Pétain to take over more of the line. He kept his main reserves near the junction of the Allied Armies and sent up reinforcements in dribblets, divisions singly or in pairs, replacing those engaged by moving others up from the rear. His action in refusing to do more was justified by results, and this limitation of assistance to the absolute minimum may well be claimed as proof of the highest military judgment in relation to the Allied cause as a whole: he kept his head and declined to send his none too plentiful reserves in response to every call from General Pétain as well as from Sir Douglas Haig. But his decision cost the British Army heavy casualties, and was at the time the cause of overwhelming anxiety to G.H.Q.

As it turned out, the co-operation of the French and British divisions both in Picardy in March and in Flanders in April was by no means happy; in fact, in Flanders, the ill-success of the French efforts and the loss of Kemmel by the French 28th Division had a depressing effect on the British troops. The fighting methods of the two nations were throughout too dissimilar for them to combine perfectly together. At bottom, the French infantryman had a better idea of what was reasonably possible than had his British confrère: hence the British felt on many occasions that they had been "let down". Possibly, co-operation would have run more smoothly had the British liaison officers with French formations, and vice versa, been more senior than they were, able to act as representatives rather

than reporting officers, and had both sides understood better each other's language as well as methods.

The crisis was past before more than four American divisions were available: but the fact that tens of thousands of American troops were on their way to France had undoubtedly an important effect in heartening the troops on the Western Front. Moreover, this impending reinforcement impelled Ludendorff to make decisions and order attacks in too great haste and without the thorough preparations of the 21st March 1918.

The lessons of March-April 1918 are not so much strategical and tactical as constitutional and political; for the next war, if there be one, will be fought on very different lines. The preliminaries of the great campaign of 1918 offer a rich field for reflection as to the principles which should govern the relations between the Government of a democratic State and its military advisers, including the commanders of the Armies in the field. The campaign itself exhibits the difficulties of warfare conducted by a Coalition, but still more the drawbacks in a national system which forbids adequate preparations for war: it is a system benevolent to our enemies; for it entails the certainty of grievous cost of the best blood of the Empire, heavy financial burden in the times which follow, and the inevitable danger of a defeat from which recovery might never be allowed.

NOTE I

CASUALTIES

Only the gross, uncorrected casualties, reported soon after events, can be given; and the various sets available do not always agree, do not cover quite the same periods, and do not sometimes include all arms of the service. To investigate the figures thoroughly by examination of unit Part II. Orders, which sooner or later account for every officer and man, was quite beyond the powers of the small staff of the Historical Section: to examine these orders for the infantry alone for the first day of the Battle of the Somme 1916—when far fewer divisions were engaged than in March 1918—as was stated in the Preface to "1916" Volume I., took one member of the staff nearly six months. Unfortunately, few of the divisional histories have gone into the question of casualties. Some do not mention them at all.

To take first the Picardy battle of the 21st March-5th April, the estimated casualties for cavalry and infantry only from the 21st to 31st March are given in the Adjutant-General's war diary as 4,477

officers and 119,985 other ranks. Those for the 1st to the 5th April are not recorded separately. The total for the whole of March for the whole Western Front is given as 6,209 officers and 143,347 other ranks.

By adding together the casualties given in the divisional and other war diaries, some in the General Staff papers, some in those of the A. and Q. Staffs, which seem to give the most reliable figures for the period 21st March-5th April, a higher total is reached: about 178,000 of which details are given below. These figures are probably the best, but they are gross figures; "missing", besides prisoners, wounded and unwounded, undoubtedly include some of the killed, some sick and a percentage of absentees who subsequently rejoined.

To give examples of discrepancies: for the 2nd Division, the divisional war diary total is 3,928 (exclusive of its losses by gas before the 21st March); but its divisional history tabulates the casualties for the month of March—and the division lost very few between the 1st and 5th April—as only 2,593. For the 12th Division the war diary total is 3,510; but the divisional history gives only 2,925 for the period ending, not the 5th, but the 22nd April. For the 47th Division, the war diary total is 4,471; the divisional history for the 21st-26th March gives 2,391, and nothing more. It is therefore certain that the divisional returns are over the mark, and that a deduction must at least be made for "missing" who subsequently returned. For the 1st July 1916 the percentage was found to be about 7 per cent; in March 1918 it was certainly higher, probably 10 per cent, as many men lost their units and remained with others, or were "stragglers" for many days.

The gross total of the divisional statistics under the heading of "missing" is 89,149 officers and other ranks. The Germans, in the bulletin of the 4th April 1918, claimed "more than 90,000 prisoners"; of this total, Hutier's Army, opposed to the French Third and First Armies and part of the British Fifth Army, was given credit for 51,218 between the 21st and 28th March. Now, the total number of missing of the portion of the Fifth Army (III., XVIII. and half the XIX. Corps) opposed to Hutier's Army for the longer period 21st March to the 5th April, is only 35,600; possibly some 15,000 of the prisoners were French. This would leave the total number of British prisoners at 75,000. If from the British gross total of 89,149 missing, there are deducted 10 per cent,¹ who subsequently returned, and, according to experience, another 10 per cent "killed" (that is left on the field or died before they were taken on the German books), there are some 72,000 prisoners, wounded and unwounded: about the number the German figures indicate. From the Courts of Enquiry on returned officer prisoners of war (some 70 per cent of whom rendered statements), it appears that of the prisoners who fell into enemy hands just under 30 per cent were wounded, just over 10 per cent were gassed, and just over 60 per cent were unwounded.

On this basis, the gross total of 178,000 casualties for the period 21st March-5th April, by deduction of missing who returned, becomes 160,000, which is not widely different to the Adjutant-General's figures for March only, 149,556, when it is recalled that the 1st to 5th April were not days of severe fighting, and the losses were probably about 10,000. Of this total of 160,000, in round figures, some

¹ See footnote to the casualties of the XVIII. Corps below.

22,000 were probably killed, 96,000 wounded or gassed, and 42,000 unwounded prisoners.

For the Lys fighting in Flanders 9th to 30th April, the gross total is 82,040, including 31,881 missing. The proportion of missing who returned is not so high as in the earlier fighting, and may be taken at the Somme figure of 7 per cent, which leaves a net total of 76,800.

The total British losses in the two offensives come, therefore, to about 236,300. For the period 21st March to 30th April, the return made on the 6th May by the Adjutant-General to the Commander-in-Chief gave the casualties as 9,704 officers and 230,089 other ranks; total, 239,793, which is fairly close to the total arrived at by correction of the divisional figures. The French losses for the same period are given as 92,004 [F.O.A. vi. (i), p. 522]: thus the total for the Allies is between 329,000 and 332,000.

For the German casualties, General Kabisch (in "*Ergänzungen zu Streitfragen des Weltkrieges*", p. 426) gives for the 21st March to 30th April, 12,300 officers and 336,000 other ranks; total 348,300. Whether lightly wounded are excluded, as usual, is not stated.

It is evident from these figures and rough calculations that, as in other great battles of the War, the losses on both sides were nearly the same. At the Somme, those of the Germans were a little under 600,000, and those of the Allies perhaps a little over. At Verdun, the totals were: French 362,000, Germans 336,000 (See "1916" Volume I., pp. 496-7). The latest volume of the German official history (x., p. 296) remarks that there was no foundation for Falkenhayn's idea at the time that French casualties were three or four times those of the Germans.

GROSS CASUALTIES 21ST MARCH-5TH APRIL BY CORPS

	Officers.			Other Ranks.			Total.
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	
III. Corps .	73	239	342	774	3,637	8,930	13,995
XVIII. Corps	110	467	485	994	6,088	15,937	24,031
XIX. Corps .	231	839	609	2,129	10,871	19,268	33,947
VII. Corps .	94	332	220	1,123	5,769	6,841	14,379
V. Corps .	160	607	243	1,823	9,428	7,552	19,813
IV. Corps .	211	756	417	2,526	11,852	13,848	29,610
VI. Corps .	135	542	370	1,835	10,398	10,376	23,656
XVII. Corps .	56	164	57	741	3,547	1,846	6,411
XIII. Corps .	20	59	25	188	1,927	906	3,125
Cavalry Corps	40	198	15	562	2,817	668	4,300
Australian Corps .	63	153	12	935	2,877	182	4,222
Carey's Force						approx. 250	
	1,193	4,356	2,795	13,630	69,161	86,354	177,739

CASUALTIES

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CASUALTIES 21ST MARCH-5TH APRIL

BY DIVISIONS

	Officers.			Other Ranks.			Total.
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	
III. Corps :							
Corps troops*	6*	37*	4*	53*	274*	159*	533
58th Division	3	31	87	110	397	1,606	2,234
18th Division	42	107	120	368	1,861	2,937	5,435
14th Division	22	64	131	243	1,105	4,228	5,793
	73	239	342	774	3,637	8,930	13,995

XVIII. Corps :							
Corps troops	Not available separately : included in XIX. Corps						
36th Division	31	96	185	179	1,159	5,660	7,310
30th Division	21	100	97	235	1,234	3,776	5,463
61st Division	26	124	122	279	1,863	3,519	5,933
20th Division	32	147	81	301	1,782	2,982	5,825
	110	467	485	994	6,038	15,937	24,031

For this Corps in addition to the gross figures there is a return made out three days later when stragglers had returned. The totals for the 36th, 30th and 20th Divisions were then 6109, 5051, 5004, *i.e.* 10 per cent less than the above.

XIX. Corps :							
Corps troops	28	118	30	301	1,571	460	2,508
24th Division	37	112	91	277	1,515	2,349	4,381
66th Division	32	130	178	341	1,254	5,088	7,023
16th Division*	29*	104*	144*	369*	1,327*	5,176*	7,149
50th Division	34	103	41	303	1,718	1,280	3,479
8th Division	41	142	54	307	1,710	2,615	4,869
39th Division	30	130	71	231	1,776	2,300	4,538
	231	839	609	2,129	10,871	19,268	33,947

VII. Corps :							
Corps troops	9	48	3	129	643	435	1,267
21st Division	34	114	91	355	1,614	2,735	4,943
9th Division	25	113	105	304	1,799	2,760	5,106
35th Division	26	57	21	335	1,713	911	3,063
	94	332	220	1,123	5,769	6,841	14,379

V. Corps :							
Corps troops	7	49	—	65	366	12	999
47th Division	28	113	77	294	1,786	2,173	4,471
63rd Division	35	126	69	343	1,637	1,877	4,137
17th Division	30	89	22	327	1,496	804	2,768
2nd Division	34	118	55	372	1,489	1,860	3,928
12th Division	26	112	20	422	2,104	826	3,510
	160	607	243	1,823	9,428	7,552	19,813

* In the war diaries only the total is given : this has been divided according to the usual percentages.

CASUALTIES 21ST MARCH-5TH APRIL—BY DIVISIONS (*concluded*)

	Officers.			Other Ranks.			
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
IV. Corps :							
Corps troops	. 11	40	5	103	547	169	875
51st Division	. 24	92	103	308	1,624	2,714	4,865
6th Division	. 37	78	134	292	975	3,645	5,161
19th Division	. 15	91	47	259	1,327	2,308	4,047
25th Division	. 33	104	40	279	1,353	1,548	3,357
41st Division	. 21	84	52	256	1,167	2,011	3,591
42nd Division	. 21	92	13	272	1,899	668	2,965
62nd Division	. 14	52	18	214	936	558	1,792
New Zealand Div.	. 29	97	—	482	1,748	63	2,419
37th Division (5th April)	. 6	26	5	61	276	164	538
	211	756	417	2,526	11,852	13,848	29,610
VI. Corps :							
Corps troops	. 4	30	1	76	309	56	476
59th Division	. 20	43	210	95	729	4,941	6,038
34th Division	. 17	53	67	182	952	1,841	3,112
3rd Division	. 27	77	35	400	1,690	1,298	3,527
Guards Division	. 15	86	2	321	1,504	30	1,958
31st Division	. 12	46	20	265	1,121	886	2,350
32nd Division	. 12	116	1	186	2,429	82	2,826
40th Division	. 25	74	34	236	1,188	1,242	2,799
2nd Canadian Div.	. 3	17	—	74	476	—	570
	135	542	370	1,835	10,398	10,376	23,656
XVII. Corps :							
Corps troops	. 8	29	1	93	547	17	695
15th Division	. 29	85	37	364	1,865	1,120	3,500
4th Division	. 19	50	19	284	1,135	709	2,216
	56	164	57	741	3,547	1,846	6,411
XIII. Corps :							
Corps troops	. 5	14	—	16	266	—	301
56th Division	. 15	45	25	172	1,661	906	2,824
	20	59	25	188	1,927	906	3,125
Cavalry Corps :							
1st Cav. Div.	. 12	63	9	161	769	273	1,287
2nd Cav. Div.	. 19	73	5	205	1,162	169	1,633
3rd Cav. Div.	. 9	62	1	196	886	226	1,880
	40	198	15	562	2,817	668	4,300
Australian Corps :							
Corps troops	. 2	4	3	5	24	4	42
3rd Aus. Div.	. 22	68	3	349	1,279	49	1,770
4th Aus. Div.	. 33	76	6	533	1,451	129	2,233
5th Aus. Div.	. 1	5	—	48	123	—	177
	63	153	12	935	2,877	182	4,222

CASUALTIES

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GROSS CASUALTIES 9TH-30TH APRIL

[As there were so many transfers these are given by divisions, corps troops' losses being included under the Armies.]

	Killed.	Officers. Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Other Ranks. Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
First Army	9	88	28	127	1,047	227	1,526
Second Army	36	128	21	400	2,002	225	2,812
1st Division	16	65	18	271	1,251	751	2,372
3rd "	8	30	7	189	1,149	402	1,785
4th "	28	75	9	347	1,748	361	2,568
5th "	17	101	2	298	1,659	85	2,162
6th "	7	43	—	95	822	7	974
9th "	35	95	39	401	1,832	1,646	4,048
19th "	22	76	30	380	1,782	2,275	4,565
21st "	12	60	38	277	1,565	1,497	3,449
25th "	41	162	59	452	3,462	3,408	7,584
29th "	29	78	46	343	1,843	1,965	4,304
30th "	9	31	5	59	320	177	601
31st "	20	91	45	283	1,726	2,476	4,641
33rd "	30	77	38	425	1,306	1,401	3,277
34th "	31	135	40	254	2,202	2,397	5,059
36th "	14	20	2	121	736	469	1,362
39th "	3	17	6	67	409	327	829
40th "	26	62	97	195	1,189	2,923	4,492
49th "	46	155	33	752	3,397	1,603	5,986
50th "	11	73	37	193	1,408	2,543	4,265
51st "	19	71	47	197	1,419	1,213	2,966
55th "	36	119	46	513	2,153	1,004	3,871
59th "	14	47	7	171	1,061	1,063	2,363
61st "	19	81	9	224	1,376	703	2,412
1st Australian Division	30	68	1	316	1,329	23	1,767
	568	2,048	710	7,350	40,193	31,171	82,040

NOTE II

AMMUNITION

The following table, extracted from the records, shows the number of Guns in Action with the British Armies on the Western Front, number of rounds received, and the weekly number expended.

	Guns in Action 31 Dec. '17	Guns in Action 30 June '18	Rounds Receipts 31 Mar. '18 to 30 June '18	Weekly Expenditure					Total
				24 Mar. '18	31 Mar. '18	7 Apr. '18	14 Apr. '18	21 Apr. '18	
18-pdr.	2,880	3,087	18,311,195	1,530,026	3,941,463			1,204,068	8,812,788
4.5-inch how.	877	967	3,418,883	418,540	1,064,545			335,510	2,363,404
60-pdr.	313	455	1,552,554	171,018	451,455			150,777	1,080,575
6-inch how.	846	984	3,657,303	384,367	929,259			312,046	2,272,295
6-inch gun	55	123	216,449	18,724	32,953			17,317	102,520
8-inch how.	240	240	395,376	88,906	124,109			28,722	307,902
9.2-inch how.	188	218	140,460	74,317	90,579			11,682	210,486
12-inch how.	44	42	15,157	5,090	3,940			1,780	14,540
15-inch how.	10	8	755	394	183			—	710

APPENDICES

SKELETON ORDER OF BATTLE OF BRITISH TROOPS ENGAGED 27TH MARCH-5TH APRIL 1918

FIFTH ARMY

(General Sir Hubert Gough ; *from 27th March*,
General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Bt.)

- III. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir R. H. K. Butler) :
14th (Light) Division (Major-General W. H. Greenly ; *from 1st April*, Major-General P. C. B. Skinner) :
41, 42, 43 Brigades.
18th (Eastern) Division (Major-General R. P. Lee) :
53, 54, 55 Brigades.
58th (2/1st London) Division (Major-General A. B. E. Cator) :
173, 174, 175 Brigades.
- XVIII. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir I. Maxse) :
20th (Light) Division (Major-General W. Douglas Smith ; *from 3rd April*, Major-General C. G. S. Carey) :
59, 60, 61 Brigades.
30th Division (Major-General W. de L. Williams) :
21, 89, 90 Brigades.
36th (Ulster) Division (Major-General O. S. W. Nugent) :
107, 108, 109 Brigades.
61st (2nd South Midland) Division (Major-General C. J. Mackenzie) :
182, 183, 184 Brigades.
- XIX. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir H. Watts ; *until 8 p.m. on 5th April*, when command passed to Lieut.-Gen. Sir R. H. K. Butler) :
8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker) :
23, 24, 25 Brigades.
16th (Irish) Division (Major-General Sir C. P. A. Hull) :
47, 48, 49 Brigades.
24th Division (Major-General A. C. Daly) :
17, 72, 73 Brigades.
39th Division (Major-General E. Feetham, *killed 29th March* ; *then* Major-General C. A. Blacklock) :
116, 117, 118 Brigades.
50th (Northumbrian) Division (Major-General H. C. Jackson) :
149, 150, 151 Brigades.

66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division (Major-General N. Malcolm, *until 29th March* ; Br.-General A. J. Hunter *until 31st March* ; then Major-General H. K. Bethell) :

197, 198, 199 Brigades.

Carey's Force *from 3.45 P.M. on 27th March.*

1st Cavalry Division (*see Cavalry Corps*) *until 2nd April.*

20th Division (*from XVIII. Corps*) *from midnight, 27th/28th March.*

61st Division (*from XVIII. Corps*) *from midnight, 27th/28th March.*

9th Australian Brigade (3rd Aus. Div.) *from 5.40 P.M. on 29th March.*

30th Division (*from XVIII. Corps*) *from 30th March.*

2nd Cavalry Division (*see Cavalry Corps*) *from 30th March until 4th April.*

18th Division (*from III. Corps*) *from 1st April.*

14th " "

58th " " *on 4th-5th April.*

3rd Cavalry Division (*see Cavalry Corps*) *on 4th-5th April.*

THIRD ARMY

(General Hon. Sir Julian Byng)

VII. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir W. N. Congreve) :

21st Division (Major-General D. G. M. Campbell) :

62, 64, 110 Brigades.

35th Division (Major-General G. McK. Franks ; *from 27th March*, Major-General A. H. Marindin) :

104, 105, 106 Brigades.

9th (Scottish) Division (Major-General C. A. Blacklock ; *from 28th March*, Br.-General H. H. Tudor) :

26, 27, South African Brigades.

3rd Australian Division (Major-General Sir J. Monash) :

9 Aus., 10 Aus., 11 Aus. Brigades.

V. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe) :

12th (Eastern) Division (Major-General A. B. Scott) :

35, 36, 37 Brigades.

2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) :

5, 6, 99 Brigades.

17th (Northern) Division (Major-General P. R. Robertson) :

50, 51, 52 Brigades.

47th (1/2nd London) Division (Major-General Sir G. F. Gorringe) :

140, 141, 142 Brigades.

63rd (Royal Naval) Division (Major-General C. E. Lawrie) :

188, 189, 190 Brigades.

IV. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir G. M. Harper) :

19th (Western) Division (Major-General G. D. Jeffreys) :

56, 57, 58 Brigades.

25th Division (Major-General Sir E. G. T. Bainbridge) :

7, 74, 75 Brigades.

41st Division (Major-General Sir S. T. B. Lawford) :

122, 123, 124 Brigades.

42nd (1st East Lancashire) Division (Major-General A. Solly-Flood) :

125, 126, 127 Brigades.

51st (Highland) Division (Major-General G. T. C. Carter-Campbell) :

152, 153, 154 Brigades.

62nd (2nd West Riding) Division (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite) :

185, 186, 187 Brigades.

New Zealand Division (Major-General Sir A. H. Russell) :

1 N.Z., 2 N.Z., N.Z.R. Brigades.

4th Australian Division (Major-General E. G. Sinclair-MacLagan) :

4 Aus., 12 Aus., 13 Aus. Brigades.

From 8.15 P.M. 29th March :

37th Division (Major-General H. Bruce Williams) :

63, 111, 112 Brigades.

VI. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir J. A. L. Haldane) :

Guards Division (Major-General G. P. T. Feilding) :

1 Gds., 2 Gds., 3 Gds. Brigades.

3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Deverell) :

8, 9, 76 Brigades.

31st Division (Major-General R. J. Bridgford) :

4 Gds., 92, 93 Brigades.

40th Division (Major-General J. Ponsonby) *until 28th March :*

119, 120, 121 Brigades.

From 6 P.M. 28th March :

2nd Canadian Division (Major-General H. E. Burstall) :

4 Can., 5 Can., 6 Can. Brigades.

From 30th March :

32nd Division (Major-General C. D. Shute) :

14, 96, 97 Brigades.

XVII. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir Charles Fergusson, Bt.) :

4th Division (Major-General T. G. Matheson) :

10, 11, 12 Brigades.

15th (Scottish) Division (Major-General H. L. Reed) :

44, 45, 46 Brigades.

From 6 P.M. 28th March :

1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. C. Macdonell) :

1 Can., 2 Can., 3 Can. Brigades.

FIRST ARMY

(General Sir Henry Horne)

XIII. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle) :

56th (1/1st London) Division (Major-General F. A. Dudgeon) :

167, 168, 169 Brigades.

3rd Canadian Division (Major-General F. J. Lipsett) *until*

6.45 P.M. 30th March :

7 Can., 8 Can., 9 Can. Brigades.

From 28th to 30th March :

40th Division (*from VI. Corps*).

CAVALRY CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir C. T. McM. Kavanagh) :
1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens) :
1 Cav., 2 Cav., 9 Cav. Brigades.
2nd Cavalry Division (Major-General T. T. Pitman) :
3 Cav., 4 Cav., 5 Cav. Brigades.
3rd Cavalry Division (Major-General A. E. W. Harman) :
6 Cav., 7 Cav., Canadian Cav. Brigades.

APPENDIX 2.

ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE FRENCH GROUP OF ARMIES OF RESERVE (GENERAL FAYOLLE)

CO-OPERATING WITH THE BRITISH FROM 27TH MARCH 1918¹

THIRD ARMY (General Humbert) :
V. Corps (Gen. Pellé) : 9th, 10th, 35th, 53rd and 77th Divisions ;
II. Cavalry Corps (Gen. Robillot) : 22nd, 62nd and 1st Cavalry Divisions ;
XXXV. Corps (Gen. Jacquot).²

FIRST ARMY (General Debeney) :
VI. Corps (Gen. de Mitry) : 5th Cavalry and 56th Divisions.

Approaching the battlefield, heads arrive during 27th March :

38th Division, by motorbus, without artillery. The head was beginning to arrive in Third Army area on morning of 27th.

70th Division, by motorbus, without artillery. The head was beginning to arrive in Third Army area on morning of 27th.

12th Division, by rail and march. Transport began on 25th. The head was beginning to arrive in First Army area on morning of 27th.

133rd Division, by rail and march. Transport began on 25th. The head was beginning to arrive in First Army area on morning of 27th.

¹ A proportion of heavy artillery and flying groups were sent with the divisions.

² General Jacquot took over part of General Pellé's front and the troops in it on the 26th. The arrival of the 36th and 70th Divisions which constituted General Jacquot's new XXXV. Corps (see page 3, f.n. 3) is noted below.

4th Cavalry Division, by rail and march. Transport began on 26th. The head was beginning to arrive in First Army area on morning of 27th.

36th Division, by rail and march. Transport began on 24th. The head was beginning to arrive in Third Army area on morning of 28th.

En route to G.A.R. (See "1918" Vol. I., p. 455, f.n. 2).

127th Division entrainment begun on 26th. Not engaged until 31st March.

162nd Division by lorry begun on 27th. Not engaged until 31st March.

166th Division embusment begun on 26th. Not engaged until 29th March.

Ordered to G.A.R. on 24th March :

17th Division embusment begun on 27th. Arrived 4th April, engaged 5th.

18th Division embusment begun on 1st April. Not engaged.

59th Division embusment begun on 7th. Not engaged until 9th April.

152nd Division embusment begun on 29th. Arrived 10th April. Not engaged.

31st Division embusment begun on 31st. To Flanders.

Moroccan Division embusment begun on 31st. Not engaged.

Ordered to G.A.R. after the Doullens Conference on 26th March :

at 3 P.M. from G.A.C., where they were replaced by 4 divisions from G.A.E., which got 3 American divisions (2nd, 26th and 42nd) :

15th Division entrainment begun on 27th ; to Sixth Army.

67th Division moved by lorry on 30th ; to Robillot's corps (Third Army). Head engaged on 31st.

163rd Division moved by lorry on 27th ; to Mesple's Group (First Army). Head engaged on 29th.

169th Division moved by lorry on 27th ; to XXXV. Corps. Not engaged.

2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division moved by lorry on 29th ; to First Army. Not engaged up to 4th April.

at 6.16 P.M., from G.A.E. :

19th Division not sent : remained in Champagne.

48th Division entrained 5th April : to Sixth Army.

32nd Division entrained 3rd April : to Fifth Army in Flanders.

APPENDIX 3.

SKELETON ORDER OF BATTLE OF BRITISH
TROOPS ENGAGED 9TH-30TH APRIL

FIRST ARMY

(General Sir Henry Horne)

I. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir A. Holland) :

1st Division (Major-General E. P. Strickland) :

1, 2, 3 Brigades.

11th (Northern) Division (Major-General H. R. Davies) :

32, 33, 34 Brigades.

46th (1st North Midland) Division (Major-General W. Thwaites) :

137, 138, 139 Brigades.

*From 12th April :*3rd Division (*from XI. Corps*).4th „ (*from XVII. Corps*).55th „ (*from XI. Corps*).

XI. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir R. Haking) :

51st Division (*from IV. Corps*).55th (1st West Lancashire) Division (Major-General H. S. Jeudwine) *until 8 A.M. 12th April :*

164, 165, 166 Brigades.

2nd Portuguese Division (Major-General Gomez da Costa) :

1, 2, 3, 4 Brigades.

*From 11th April (one brigade arriving on 9th) :*3rd Division (*from VI. Corps*) *until 8 A.M. 12th April.**From 11th April :*61st Division (*from XIX. Corps*).*From 12th April :*5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stephens) *from Italy :*

13, 14, 95 Brigades.

50th Division (*from XV. Corps*) :XV. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir J. Du Cane ; *from 12th April*, Lieut.-General Sir B. de Lisle) *transferred to Second Army noon 12th April :*34th Division (Major-General C. L. Nicholson) (*from VI. Corps*) *until 6 P.M. 12th April :*

101, 102, 103 Brigades.

40th Division (*from XIII. Corps*).50th Division (*from XIX. Corps*), *until noon 12th April.**From 9th April :*29th Division (Major-General D. E. Cayley) *from Second Army :*

86, 87, 88 Brigades.

*From 10th April :*147 Brigade of 49th Division (*from XXII. Corps*).*From 11th April :*31st Division (*from VI. Corps*).*From 12th April :*

1st Australian Division (Major-General Sir H. B. Walker) :

1 Aus., 2 Aus., 3 Aus. Brigades.

SECOND ARMY

(General Sir Herbert Plumer)

IX. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir A. H. Gordon) :

9th Division (*from VII. Corps*) until 10.15 P.M. 11th April.19th ,, (*from IV. Corps*).

25th ,, "

*From 10th April :*148 Brigade of 49th Division (*from XXII. Corps*).*From 11th April :*33rd Division (Major-General R. J. Pinney) *from XVII. Corps,*
to which it had gone on 7th April from Second Army :

19, 98, 100 Brigades.

*From 6 P.M. 12th April :*34th Division (*from XV. Corps*).*From 13th April :*59th Division less 177 Brigade (*from VIII. Corps*).71 Brigade of 6th Division (*from II. Corps*).

XXII. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir A. Godley) :

6th Division (Major-General T. O. Marden) *in II. Corps 13th-*
16th April less 71 Brigade to IX. Corps, 13th April :

16, 18, 71 Brigades.

21st Division (*from VII. Corps*).49th (1st West Riding) Division (Major-General N. J. G.
Cameron) *until 10th April, then 146th Brigade only :*

146, 147, 148 Brigades.

*From 10.15 P.M. 11th April :*9th Division (*from IX. Corps*).*From 12th April :*39th Division Composite Brigade (Br.-General A. B. Hubback)
(*from XIX. Corps*).

II. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir C. W. Jacob) :

30th Division (*from XIX. Corps*) until 17th April.

36th ,, "

*From 13th April :*6th Division less 71 Brigade (*from XXII. Corps*) until 16th
*April.*41st Division (*from VIII. Corps*).177 Brigade of 59th Division (*from VIII. Corps*).

VIII. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston) :

41st Division (*from IV. Corps*) until 13th April.59th (2nd North Midland) Division (Major-General C. F. Romer)
(*from VI. Corps*) until 13th April :

176, 177, 178 Brigades.

FOURTH (formerly FIFTH) ARMY

(General Sir Henry Rawlinson, Bt.)

III. CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir R. H. K. Butler) :

8th Division (*see XIX. Corps, Appendix 1*).18th „ (*see III. Corps, Appendix 1*).

58th „ „

AUSTRALIAN CORPS (Lieut.-General Sir W. Birdwood) :

2nd Australian Division (Major-General N. M. Smyth) :

5 Aus., 6 Aus., 7 Aus. Brigades.

3rd Australian Division (*see VII. Corps, Appendix 1*).

5th Australian Division (Major-General Sir J. J. T. Hobbs) :

8 Aus., 14 Aus., 15 Aus. Brigades.

18th Australian Brigade (4th Australian Division).

APPENDIX 4.

ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE FRENCH
TROOPS ENGAGED MARCH-APRIL 1918

THIRD ARMY (General Humbert)

XXXV. CORPS (Gen. Jacquot) : 70th Division (*to 16th April*) ;
36th Division (*to 9th April and from 15th April*) ; 169th Division
(*from 1st April*) ; 60th Division (*6th-12th April*) ; 165th Division
(*6th April*). *See also FIRST ARMY below.*

V. CORPS (Gen. Pellé) : 77th Division (*to 13th April*) ; 10th Division
(*to 2nd April*) ; 9th, 35th and 58rd Divisions (*to 1st April*) ;
62nd Division (*3rd-13th April*) ; 17th Division (*14th-22nd
April*) ; 65th Division (*from 14th April*) ; 18th Division (*from
21st April*) ; 64th Division (*from 29th April*).

II. CAVALRY CORPS (Gen. Robillot) : 22nd, 62nd and 1st Cavalry
Divisions ; 38th Division (*28th-30th March*) ; 67th Division
(*30th/31st March*).

*This corps was reconstituted 1st-5th April to consist of 2nd, 3rd and
6th Cavalry Divisions ; see also D.A.N. below.*

FIRST ARMY (General Debeney)

VI. CORPS (Gen. de Mitry) : 56th Division (*to 1st April*) ; 5th Cavalry
Division (*to 4th April*) ; 12th Division (*28th March-7th April*) ;
162nd Division (*from 31st March*) ; 45th Division (*4th-29th
April*).

MESPLE'S GROUP : 138rd and 4th Cavalry Divisions ; 168rd Division
(*from 29th March*). *See also XXXVI. Corps below.*

XXXVI. CORPS (Gen. Nollet): MESPLE'S GROUP (*30th March-6th April*); 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division (*30th March-4th April*); 29th Division (*2nd-4th April*); 17th Division (*from 4th April*). See also D.A.N. below.

IX. CORPS (Gen. C. Mangin): 127th Division (*31st March-15th April*); 166th Division (*31st March-10th April*); 59th Division (*4th-28th April*); 152nd Division (*from 13th April*); 3rd Division (*from 27th April*).

XXXV. CORPS *3rd-5th April, from Third Army.*

XXXI. CORPS (Gen. Toulorge) *from 6th April, from Fifth Army*: 64th Division (*6th April and 10th-28th April*); 29th Division and 2nd Dismounted Cavalry Division (*8th-15th April*); Moroccan Division (*12th April and from 25th April*); 18th Division (*13th-20th April*); 131st Division (*13th-28th April*); 165th Division (*from 25th April*).

TENTH ARMY (General Maistre)

XIV. CORPS (Gen. Marjoulet) *from 10th April. See also FIFTH ARMY below.*

34th Division *13th-16th April.*

14th „ *13th-26th April.*

XVI. CORPS (Gen. Corvisart) *17th-26th April. See also FIFTH ARMY and D.A.N. below.*

46th and 47th Divisions *from 27th April.*

FIFTH ARMY (General J. Micheler)

XVI. CORPS *29th March-16th April.*

48th Division *29th March-6th April.*

154th Division *30th March-2nd April.*

129th and Moroccan Divisions *31st March-3rd April.*

XIV. CORPS *2nd-9th April.*

XXXI. CORPS *2nd-5th April.*

I. CAVALRY CORPS (Gen. Féraud) *5th-26th April.*

131st Division *7th-10th April.*

XX. CORPS (Gen. Berdoulat) *from 9th April.*

133rd Division *9th-11th April.*

46th and 47th Divisions *9th-14th April and 17th-19th April.*

43rd Division *13th-21st April and 30th April.*

72nd Division *14th-22nd April.*

153rd Division *14th and 15th April.*

3rd Division *15th-21st April.*

66th Division *19th-25th April.*

X. CORPS (Gen. Vandenberg) *21st-29th April.*

42nd Division *22nd-29th April.*

15th Colonial Division *25th-29th April.*

I. CORPS (Gen. Lacapelle) *from 28th April.*

168th Division *28th April.*

87th Division *29th April.*

121st Division *30th April.*

Formed 19th April :

DÉTACHEMENT D'ARMÉE DU NORD (D.A.N.)

(General de Mitry)

II. CAVALRY CORPS *from Third Army* : 2nd Cavalry Division (*19th April and 27th-29th April*) ; 3rd Cavalry Division (*to 29th April*) ; 6th Cavalry Division (*19th April and from 27th April*) ; 34th and 133rd Divisions (*19th and 20th April*) ; 28th Division (*until 27th April*) ; 154th Division (*until 29th April*) ; 39th Division (*from 25th April*) ; 31st Division (*from 29th April*).

XXXVI. CORPS *from First Army* : 17th and 65th Divisions (*until 20th April*) ; 34th and 133rd Divisions (*from 21st April*) ; 2nd Cavalry Division (*21st-26th April*).

XVI. CORPS *from 27th April, from Tenth Army* : 32nd Division.

APPENDIX 5.

INSTRUCTIONS

WITH THE OBJECT OF ASSURING CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND FRENCH AIR SERVICES

Q.G. 1st April 1918.

General Foch,
Etat-Major
No. 32.

1. INFORMATION.

Reconnaissances to ascertain the direction of the enemy's main movements, and therefore his intentions, should extend at least as far as the line St. Quentin—Cambrai—Douai, where he may detain.

Consequently :

- (a) The French Air Service has been instructed to watch particularly the general direction of movement on the following lines :

Ribemont	{ La Fère—Chauny
	{ St. Quentin
St. Quentin	{ Jussy
	{ St. Simon
	{ Ham
	{ Péronne
Le Catelet—Péronne	

Reconnaissance of the above is the concern of the Air Service of the G.A.R.—that to the West of the line Crozat Canal—Ham—Chaulnes—Bray sur Somme being the duty of the Air Commands of Armies.

- (b) To ensure that air observation covers every part of the area of approach to the battle zone, it will be necessary for the British Air Service to watch particularly the approach routes leading

from Le Catelet to Péronne	
„ Cambrai	„ Bapaume
„ Aubigny	„ Arras
„ Douai	„ Lens

The air units with Armies will undertake to follow up any movements discovered in the back areas as far as the battle front.

2. BOMBING.

The essential condition of success is the concentration of every resource of the British and French bombing formations on such few of the most important of the enemy's railway junctions as it may be possible to put out of action with certainty, and to keep out of action. Effort should not be dispersed against a large number of targets, some of which might be remote from the battle area, and, therefore difficult objectives for sustained and effective attack. Consequently :

- (a) The French Air Service (reinforced by the British and Italian "Eastern" [de L'Est] air detachments), that is to say 5 Night and 5 Day Groups¹ has been ordered, in addition to its normal battle duties, to endeavour to destroy the railway stations at :

Laon
St. Quentin
Jussy
Ham.

- (b) To interrupt traffic in the whole battle area, the British Air Service should endeavour to destroy the stations at :

Péronne
Cambrai
Aubigny au Bac
Douai.

3. FIGHTING.

At the present time the first duty of fighting aeroplanes is to assist the troops on the ground by incessant attacks, with bombs and machine gun, on columns, concentrations, or bivouacs. Air fighting is not to be sought except so far as necessary for the fulfil-

¹ A "Groupe de Bombardement" for day and night bombing normally consisted of 2-3 squadrons of 10-15 aeroplanes each.

ment of this duty. Each Allied Air Command should pursue this policy on the front of its army.

It may be desirable, in the course of particularly important operations, involving only one of the Allied Armies, to reinforce the air units of that army by those of the other. In this case such reinforcements may be asked for by G.H.Q. or by General Foch.

4. DISSEMINATION OF INTELLIGENCE.

To enable the High Command, for the purpose of making important dispositions, to utilize intelligence obtained by aircraft—intelligence that is of the greatest value in the present circumstances—it is necessary to ensure that no delay occurs in the transmission of this information.

Consequently :

- (a) The French Air Service has been instructed to centralize all intelligence in the several air commands, whence it will be transmitted to the G.A.R. by one or other of the following means :
 - (i) The existing ground wireless telegraphy organization.
 - (ii) Courier service aircraft.
 - (iii) In the event of failure of (i) and (ii)—and, in any case, each evening—by motor car or motor cycle.
The G.A.R. will forward to General Foch's headquarters any intelligence received that is likely to interest him.
- (b) Similar arrangements to the above having already been made by the British Air Command, for the centralization of intelligence to meet the requirements of its own G.H.Q. ; it only remains to ensure ¹ the exchange of important intelligence obtained by both services, British and French, between General Foch and British G.H.Q.

This exchange may be effected by means of one or other of the following methods :

- (i) By means of a ground wireless telegraphy system connecting British G.H.Q. with Beauvais (General Foch's Headquarters) working in conjunction with the wireless telegraphy organization of the G.A.R. The preparation of this system to be undertaken by British G.H.Q. in agreement with the Wireless Telegraphy Service of the G.A.R.
- (ii) By means of courier aircraft plying between the aerodrome at British G.H.Q. and Beauvais.
- (iii) Failing the above, and, in any case, at the end of each day, an officer or motor cyclist will deliver the orders and intelligence reports of the British Air Service to Beauvais and receive those of the French.

WEYGAND,
Chief of Staff.

¹ Irrespective of the liaison to be established between the flanks of adjoining British and French Armies.

APPENDIX 6.

ORDER FOR EVACUATION OF
ARMENTIÈRESTelegram.

G. 339. 10th April 1918.

First Army Order No. 204. Confirmation telephone conversation between M.G.G.S. First Army and Corps Commander XV. Corps. XV. Corps will withdraw 34th Division west of Lys river co-ordinating movement with that of IX. Corps on left. Railway bridge over Lys river west of Armentières to be destroyed under XV. Corps orders in name of G.O.C. First Army. Orders to be sent to Lieutenants Hamilton and Elmann located in dug-out in railway embankment at N.W. corner of bridge. Orders for demolition to be repeated to R.C.E. (3) Strazeele.

Acknowledge. Addressed XV. Corps, repeated Second Army, G.H.Q.

10.50 A.M.

APPENDIX 7.

NOTE

GENERAL FOCH TO FIELD-MARSHAL
SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

Montreuil
10th April 1918.
23 hours.

In view of eventual intervention North of the Somme to assist the British Army, the Tenth Army (General Maistre) with four divisions and three cavalry divisions will be pushed commencing on the 12th astride the Somme from Picquigny to Amiens, ready to advance further northwards in the general direction of the front Doullens—Acheux.

In order to permit the Tenth Army to make these movements, the British Staff will by the 12th free its zone of march between the routes Picquigny—Vignacourt—Candas—Doullens and Montières—Rubempré—Puchevillers—Raincheval—Vauchelles, both inclusive.

APPENDIX 8.

G.H.Q. OPERATION ORDER O.A.D. 811,
10TH APRIL 1918

1. All Armies will hold their ground and will employ all their resources to stop any advance on the part of the enemy.
2. French troops are moving North to the assistance of the British forces. The two leading divisions will cross the River Somme west of Amiens on the 12th instant and should reach the line Molliens au Bois—Vignacourt on the 12th and Vauchelles—Doullens on the 13th, and will be followed immediately by other divisions.
3. The zone allotted to the French troops will be bounded by the roads—

Picquigny—Vignacourt—Candas—Doullens.

Amiens—Rubempré—Vauchelles.

Both roads and intervening country will be inclusive to the French, and billeting accommodation in this area will be cleared as much as possible.

General Maistre will command the leading 4 French divisions with headquarters on 11th/12th at Hornoy and 12th/13th at Picquigny. Third and Fourth Armies will communicate with General Maistre regarding the passage of French troops through their areas.

4. As French troops move into the British areas as described above, British reserves required for the battle will be moved East and North of the above zone as required, all other troops being reconstituted and those unlikely to be useful for the battle will be moved West of the above zone.

5. The 3rd Cavalry Division will march at once to join the Cavalry Corps which will be disposed in G.H.Q. Reserve under orders of the Third Army in the area Doullens—St. Pol—Auxi le Chateau.

6. The 1st Australian Division will move by rail from the Fourth Army to the Second Army on the 11th instant in G.H.Q. Reserve, and will be disposed, in the first instance, by the Second Army to cover Hazebrouck.

7. The 133rd French Division is moving by rail on the 11th instant to the neighbourhood of Bergues.

8. Acknowledge.

G.H.Q.
11 P.M.

J. H. DAVIDSON, M.G.,
for Lieut.-General,
Chief of the General Staff.

APPENDIX 9.

SECOND ARMY OPERATION ORDER

No. 17 11TH APRIL 1918

1. The Second Army has been heavily attacked both yesterday Maps 13, and to-day and after a stubborn and determined resistance 14. against nine enemy divisions the Messines—Wyttschaete Ridge and Hill 68 remain in our hands.

The First Army on our right has also been heavily attacked.

2. In view of the heavy fighting and of the necessity of economising troops, the Army Commander has authorized the withdrawal of the IX. Corps to-night to the general line Steenwerck Station—Pont D'Achelles—Neuve Eglise—Wulverghem—Wyttschaete, all inclusive, in touch with 88th Brigade of XV. Corps on the right and with XXII. Corps at Pick House.
3. For the same reason, and in order to provide against the threat against our right flank in the direction of Bailleul and Hazebrouck, the Army Commander has decided to withdraw the II., VIII. and XXII. Corps to the "Battle Zone".
4. The withdrawal will be gradual, the Artillery being withdrawn first and the front at present held will become an outpost line, the Battle Zone forming the main line of resistance.

The outposts will not withdraw unless forced to do so by the enemy.

5. 9th Division will be transferred at once to XXII. Corps under arrangements to be made between Corps concerned. IX. Corps will continue to be responsible for the Heavy Artillery defence of the 9th Division front.

The composition of IX. Corps will be :

19th, 25th and 38rd Divisions.
H.Q. and 2 Bns. 49th Division.
108th Brigade.

6. As soon as the Battle Zone positions have been taken up, the portion allotted to VIII. Corps to be occupied by one division will be taken over by II. Corps under arrangements to be made between Corps concerned.

The VIII. Corps H.Q. will then be withdrawn to Army Reserve and will be utilized for special work under separate instructions.

7. The occupation of the Battle Zone will be carried out simultaneously by Corps and in conjunction with the 4th Belgian Division d'Armée.

The limits of responsibility of Corps on this line have been issued and the limits of responsibility of Corps on the Rear Zone have been issued to-day in G. 145.¹

8. The Second Army will take over the XV. Corps to-morrow at 12 noon.

¹ Not reproduced.

This Corps consists of 29th, 31st, 34th and 40th Divisions, 74th Infantry Brigade, one Bn. 49th Division, 1 Brigade 49th Division.

The southern boundary of XV. Corps will be the line Trou Bayard—Neuf Berquin—La Motte—Morbecque, all inclusive.

9. 1st Australian Division will join Second Army to-morrow and will be employed on the defence of Hazebrouck.
10. Acknowledge.

Issued at 11.55 P.M.

C. H. HARRINGTON,
M.G.G.S.,
Second Army.

APPENDIX 10.

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

BY FIELD-MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, K.T.,
G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.I.E., COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, BRITISH ARMIES IN FRANCE

TO ALL RANKS OF THE BRITISH ARMY
IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS

Three weeks ago to-day the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel Ports and destroy the British Army.

In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

Many amongst us now are tired. To those I would say that Victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man : there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.

D. HAIG,
F.M.,
Commander-in-Chief,
British Armies in France.

General Headquarters,
Thursday, April 11th, 1918.

APPENDIX 11.

SECOND ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 19
14TH APRIL 1918

1. All attacks made yesterday have been successfully repulsed after Maps 13, severe fighting. Indications, however, point to the enemy bringing 21. up fresh divisions to continue his attacks in the direction of Neuve Eglise and Meteren.

In accordance with the instructions of the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, the Army Commander has decided that the time has come when the Ypres Salient, which has been successfully held by this Army for so long, must be vacated.

His decision is based solely on the necessity of economising troops.

2. The withdrawal will be carried out as under :

(a) II. Corps and XXII. Corps will at once withdraw all available artillery and such ammunition, stores, etc., as is possible to rearward positions, leaving such artillery as is necessary to cover our present advanced positions and to deceive the enemy as to our intentions.

(b) The main position to be held after withdrawal is—

II. Corps.

The Pilckem Ridge as far south as White Chateau (exclusive).

XXII. Corps.

White Chateau (inclusive) to La Polka (exclusive).

IX. Corps.

La Polka (inclusive) to present battle line.

(c) The above positions will be manned as soon as possible, leaving—

(i) the present outpost line in position ;

(ii) an intermediate thin line on the front of the " Battle Zone " as a link between the forward outpost line and the new main position.

(d) The above movements should be carried out to-night and to-morrow morning.

During to-morrow night, April 15/16th, both the forward outpost line and thin intermediate line will be withdrawn through the new main position and by the morning of 16th April the troops will hold their new positions.

3. The essence of a successful withdrawal lies in deceiving the enemy.

On no account is any destruction by fire or explosion to be carried out.

Stores, etc., must be removed at night and duck boards, etc., will be left in position.

There must be no movement whatever by day to-morrow which will indicate our withdrawal to the enemy.

4. The Belgian H.Q. have been asked to issue similar instructions to the 4th Belgian Division d'Armée to conform to the arrangements of II. Corps.

II. Corps will arrange details accordingly.

5. For purposes of convenience the new main positions will be known as—

II. Corps—Pilekem Line.

XXII. Corps—Voormezele Line.

IX. Corps—Kemmel Line.

6. Corps Commanders will pay particular attention to the following points—

- (a) Traffic arrangements.
- (b) Preparation and wiring of new line.
- (c) Machine gun defence of new line.
- (d) Preparation of new H.Q. and signal communications.
- (e) Collection of outposts on withdrawal and distribution of Reserves after occupation of new lines.

7. The new boundaries and Corps areas will be issued to-day.

Acknowledge by wire.

C. H. HARRINGTON,
M.G.G.S.,
Second Army.

Issued at 1 P.M.

APPENDIX 12.

SECOND ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 20 15TH APRIL 1918

Maps 13, 1. With reference to Second Army Operation Order No. 19, the new line to be held by the Second Army will now be as under, instead of as in para. 2 of that order :

II. Corps.

Pilekem Ridge as far south as White Chateau (exclusive).

XXII. Corps.

White Chateau (inclusive) to Spanbroekmolen (inclusive).

IX. Corps.

Spanbroekmolen (exclusive) south of Bailleul to present junction with XV. Corps.

2. Second Army will not now withdraw voluntarily from either Wytschaete or Bailleul.

3. With regard to para. 3 of Second Army Operation Order No. 19, special instructions have been issued personally to Corps Commanders concerned.
4. It is probable that the Belgian Army will relieve the II. Corps on the Pilekem Ridge by the 19th April.
5. 28th and 138rd French Divisions and the 2nd and 6th French Cavalry Divisions are now concentrated on the general line Caestre—Poperinghe.
6. It is probable that French troops will take over a portion of the front between the XV. and IX. Corps at an early date in order to relieve troops of the IX. Corps that have been heavily engaged.
7. The commanders of the IX. and XV. Corps will arrange for units that have been disengaged from their own formations during the recent fighting to rejoin their formations as soon as possible.
8. Acknowledge by wire.

W. ROBERTSON, Lieut.-Col.,
for M.G.G.S.,
Second Army.

Issued at 1.20 P.M.

APPENDIX 13.

IX. CORPS OPERATION No. 96 15TH APRIL 1918

1. (a) After being very heavily attacked during most of the day Map 21. by the German *Alpine Corps*, the *117th Division* and the *11th Bavarian Division*, the six battalions of the 59th Division holding the Bailleul—Ravelsberg Ridge portion of our front were forced back this evening, after a very gallant resistance, to the general line S.8.—S.10. centrals [La Bourse—Keerseboom].
- (b) The enemy are now in possession of the Ravelsberg Ridge and of the town of Bailleul.
- (c) The 33rd Division has thrown its left back from the Steam Mill and is now holding the switch line of defence from about X.21.b.5.3. in a north-easterly direction to the cross roads about X.12.a.0.6. [W. of Meteren to Bailleul—St. Jans Cappel road] where it is in touch with the right of the 34th Division. That portion of the 33rd Division front west of X.21.b.5.3. remains unchanged.
- (d) The right of the 49th Division has been swung back to T.7.c.5.0. to S.12.b.1.4. to S.11. central [Meteren—Kemmel line] facing south-west.
2. (a) Under cover of posts which will be pushed forward by G.O.C. 34th Division to the line now held by the troops of the 59th Division about S.8. central—S.10. central [see above],

Map 22.

the 59th Division will be withdrawn to-night to the area Locre—Brulooze [$\frac{1}{2}$ mile N.E. of Locre] into Corps Reserve.

(b) The 34th Division will hold the front X.12.a.0.6. [N.E. of Meteren] where touch has been gained with the 33rd Division—S.1.b.0.3.—S.2.c.0.8.—S.2.b.0.1.—S.3.c.2.2.—S.3.d.2.6.—S.4.d.9.1. [S. of Dranoutre]. The artillery covering the present front of the 59th Division will cover the front of 34th Division on completion of the withdrawal of the 59th Division troops.

(c) The 49th Division will withdraw to-night to the following general line :—S.4.d.9.1. where touch has been gained with the 34th Division—S.6. central—N.31.d.8.5. [E. of Dranoutre].

(d) The 19th Division will withdraw to-night to the following general line :—N.31.d.8.5. [see above] where touch will be gained with the 49th Division—N.27.d.7.3.—Spanbroekmolen (exclusive) where touch will be maintained at all costs with the right of the 9th Division, XXII. Corps.

3. G.O.C. 49th Division will keep one battalion in Corps Reserve. Location to be notified as soon as possible.
4. The 25th Division (less detached troops) will be in Corps Reserve ready to move at half an hour's notice from 7 A.M. 16th instant.
5. The XXII. Corps Cavalry Regiment (now at Brulooze) is hereby placed at disposal of G.O.C. 19th Division.
6. Headquarters of Divisions will, from midnight 15/16th instant, be disposed as follows :—
25th, 33rd and 34th Divisions—Boeschepe.
49th, 19th and 59th Divisions—Westoutre.
7. G.O.C. 19th Division is responsible that Kemmel Hill is held at all costs as its loss would seriously affect the position of the XXII. Corps.

Acknowledge.

B. L. MONTGOMERY, Major,
for Br.-General,
General Staff, IX. Corps.

Issued at midnight.

APPENDIX 14.

SECOND ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 21 16TH APRIL 1918

1. The enemy succeeded in capturing Bailleul yesterday after heavy fighting.

The attack was made by the *Alpine Corps, 117th Division and 11th Bavarian Division*. Our troops were forced back after offering a gallant and determined resistance.

2. The IX. Corps line now runs approximately as under :—

X.21.b.5.3.—X.12.a.0.6.—S.8. central—S.9. central—S.10. central— Map 22.
N.31.d.6.4.—S.E. of Lindenhoeck—Spanbroekmolen.

3. The Army line northwards after withdrawal this morning will run from Spanbroekmolen via Wytschaete—White Chateau and Pilckem Ridge.

4. In consequence of the above the following will take place to-night :—

(a) XV. Corps will take over from IX. Corps that portion of 33rd Division front from present junction to a point about 200 yards west of the Meterenbeek. Arrangements to be made between Corps concerned.

(b) 133rd French Division will take over from IX. Corps the front from a point about 200 yards west of the Meterenbeek to the road in X.17.a. central (exclusive).¹
Arrangements to be made between IX. Corps and 2nd French Cavalry Corps.

5. The boundaries of the additional forward area allotted to the 2nd French Cavalry Corps are as follows :—

On the Right Flank :—

From Caestre—Flêtre—to point on front line 200 yards west of Meterenbeek.

On the Left Flank :—

From Black Houck Sheet 27.Q.22 central [half-way between Caestre and Godewaersvelde]—Schacken R.35.a.5.0.—and thence along road due south to front line.

6. A portion of one French Cavalry Division will be moved forward to Boeschepe by 11 A.M. to-day.

7. Headquarters have been established as under :—

2nd French Cavalry Corps—Zuytpeene.

133rd French Division—Terdegghem.

28th French Division—Abeele.

2nd French Cavalry Division—Winnizeele.

6th French Cavalry Division—Watou.

25th Division—Boeschepe.

33rd Division— „

34th „ — „

59th „ —Westoutre.

49th „ — „

19th „ — „

8. Acknowledge by wire.

Issued at 1 A.M.

C. H. HARRINGTON, M.G.G.S.,
Second Army.

¹ X.17.a. central is fifteen hundred yards east of Meteren. It will be observed that actually the left of the 33rd Division was slightly west of the road indicated.

APPENDIX 15.

SECOND ARMY OPERATION ORDER No. 22
16TH APRIL 1918

Map 22. 1. The French will attack to-day from the direction of the ridge Kemmel—Mont des Cats and its spur in order to restore the situation.

2. On the left the 28th French Division in close connection with the 22nd and 9th British Corps will attack in the general direction Kemmel—Messines in order to establish themselves on the spur between Wytschaete and Wulverghem.

3. The southern boundary of the front on which the attack will be carried out will be the road Lindenhoeck to Wulverghem. The northern boundary will be a line parallel to the road from Kemmel to Messines and 500 metres north-east of this road.

XXII. British Corps will at the same time carry out an attack having as its object the right flank of the German attack. The line from which the attack will start and its limits will be settled between XXII. British Corps and 2nd French Cavalry Corps.

4. The IX. British Corps will cover the right of the 28th French Division attack and will ensure the front between Dranoutre and Wulverghem.

5. On the right the 183rd French Division operating in close connection with the IX. British Corps will attack in the general direction of the line Caestre—Bailleul, its right on the Meteren Beek and its left on the road from Mont des Cats to Bailleul through Fontainhouck. Its aim being to capture Meteren and the Hill north of Meteren, if the latter is in the possession of the enemy at the hour of attack.

6. The above two infantry attacks will be connected by the IX. British Corps holding its present front. The IX. Corps Commander will have at his disposal for the holding of this front, if necessary, the 2nd and 6th French Cavalry Divisions, the infantry elements of which are now on the Mont des Cats (2nd Cavalry Division) and Mont Noir and Mont Vidaigne (6th Cavalry Division).

7. In rear of the attacking troops IX. British Corps will be responsible for the defence of Kemmel and 2nd French Cavalry Corps for the defence of Mont des Cats and Mont Noir.

8. XV. Corps will assist the attack with all available artillery fire.

9. If successful the re-capture of Neuve Eglise will be carried out at an early date.

10. The attack will be launched at 6 P.M. to-night.

11. IX. and XXII. British Corps will send Liaison Officers ("G" and "Q") to 2nd French Cavalry Corps Headquarters at once.

12. Headquarters 2nd French Cavalry Corps—Zuytpeene.
 H.Q. 133rd French Division—Caestre.
 H.Q. 28th French Division—Abeelee.
 H.Q. 2nd French Cavalry Division—Godewaersvelde.
 H.Q. 6th French Cavalry Division—Boeschepe.
 H.Q. IX. British Corps—Godewaersvelde.
 H.Q. XXII. British Corps—Steenvoorde.
 H.Q. XV. British Corps—Wardrecques.
 H.Q. Second Army—Blendecques (Adv. H.Q. Cassel).
13. Acknowledge by wire.

W. ROBERTSON, Lieut.-Colonel,
for M.G.G.S. Second Army.

Issued at 1 P.M.

APPENDIX 16.

NOTE

BY THE GENERAL-IN-CHIEF OF THE ALLIED ARMIES IN FRANCE 19TH APRIL 1918

There is no ground to lose on the Franco-British front, whether it is a matter of closing to the enemy the road to Calais, or covering the mining area, Amiens railway centre, or the Paris—Amiens railway.

What must be achieved is a foot by foot defence of the ground.

This should be based on a series of defensive organizations, and on the employment of a numerous and powerful artillery.

It must be conducted with the utmost vigour.

The defensive organizations must include at least two positions.

The second position is to be prepared in case the first should, after all, be lost. It should be occupied when the time comes by a skeleton of troops, infantry and artillery, detailed and sent there in advance, specialists in this kind of task, and stationed in the immediate vicinity of the position.

The counter-attacks, above all, will arrest the progress of the enemy and recover the ground lost. In each section of the front the ground will indicate the objectives to be given to the counter-attack as well as the nature of the counter-attack to be carried out. From these factors must be deduced the number of troops to be used and whence they are to be drawn, that is whether from the local or general reserve.

The troops intended to counter-attack should not be simply thrown into the line attacked; if this is done they are generally absorbed into it and become a dead loss. To counter-attack with

advantage they must be organized as a separate body, with a base of departure, their own objectives, a definite formation and artillery support; to ensure that the counter-attacks are made with the precision, the opportuneness and the cohesion from which they derive their entire effect, they must be foreseen, prepared and settled in Armies, corps, divisions and brigades in good time; the officers (infantry and artillery) detailed to carry them out must know in advance the units, place of departure, direction and objectives, so that when the time comes there may be no hesitation in their minds.

Thus, a double rôle falls to troops in reserve: (1) To occupy rapidly with a mere skeleton of troops the second position in order to ensure that the troops retiring are stopped there; (2) to counter-attack the enemy attack with their whole force.

The method of defence demands a previous distribution of the means—infantry and artillery—in depth.

To sum up, attention is again drawn to the urgent need:

- (a) to multiply the lines of defence and distribute the troops in depth;
- (b) to reinforce the batteries of the defence with a strong force of heavy artillery, also distributed in depth;
- (c) to arrange all the details of the counter-attacks to be made, and make these details known to those who have to carry them out.

F. FOCH.

Issued to:

The Field-Marshal, Commanding-in-Chief the British Armies (5 copies); the General Commanding-in-Chief the Armies of the North and North-East; the General commanding the G.A.R.; the Third, First, Fifth and Tenth Armies, and the D.A.N.

APPENDIX 17.

EXTRACT FROM REPORT ON THE ORGANIZATION, ETC., OF THE IX. CORPS ARTILLERY DURING THE OPERATIONS FROM 10TH TO 21ST APRIL 1918

BY BR.-GENERAL G. HUMPHREYS, COMMANDING
ROYAL ARTILLERY IX. CORPS

Grouping.

On retirement the trench warfare system of grouping ceased and brigades were commanded as a whole by their own brigade commanders.

Position of batteries of a brigade were kept as close to one another as circumstances permitted so as to simplify communications and the passage of orders.

Retirements.

All retirements were carried out in an orderly manner by successive batteries or sections so that fire should be maintained continuously. When a retirement was made, the principle of not retiring till absolutely necessary and of then making as long a one as possible consistent with bringing effective fire to bear on our existing front line was carried out successfully. Batteries or sections often remained in action after the infantry had retired through the guns.

It was impressed on brigade and battery commanders to use their own initiative as much as possible in selection of targets and even, failing communications, on necessity of retirement, but the latter was to be decided only by brigade commanders in default of orders from C.R.A. or B.G. H.A.

Liaison.

When possible the field artillery brigade commander was with infantry brigadier whose front he supported. This was found to be the ideal condition, but, if position of infantry brigadier was an unsuitable one for the field artillery brigade commander to command his batteries from, it was found more advantageous to have an artillery liaison officer with the infantry brigadier. The paramount necessity of the F.A. brigade commander being in personal touch with his batteries, especially during a retirement, was insisted upon.

Batteries did not have permanent liaison officers with battalions as this was considered wasteful and unnecessary under the constantly changing conditions, but whenever the necessity was obvious a liaison officer was provided. This system worked well.

The infantry brigadier, in consultation with the F.A. brigade commander, had full control of artillery covering his front, and batteries or sections could be told off for close support as required. This procedure during a battle of constantly changing conditions is absolutely essential and any effort at centralization of control can only lead to disaster.

Artillery Patrols.

Officer's patrols to keep in touch with the infantry situation and the position of the enemy were used with success—notably on April 14th when a patrol sent out by a battery of 19th Divisional Artillery established the fact that our troops were still holding Neuve Eglise, about which considerable doubt existed at the time.

It must be strongly impressed on all artillery officers that they will generally have to depend entirely on their own resources for keeping in touch with the tactical situation.

Forward Observation Officers.

The usual field artillery training system of F.O.O.'s was adopted and, owing to favourable ground, observation worked well and at times brilliantly.

Communications.

Communication was generally by telephone which on the whole worked well. Visual signalling was often adopted with success and on many occasions runners were used at critical moments and were instrumental in bringing effective fire to bear.

The greatest flexibility in communications is the only way to ensure success. There is no infallible method so every possible means has to be thought out and exploited.

2nd Army Brigade N.Z.F.A. who were in action on 25th Division front report as under :—

“ Serious and unnecessary trouble arose at the outset when
“ Signal personnel manning various Corps Exchanges were found to
“ have decamped apparently on the first news of enemy advance
“ thus denying to regimental troops their reliance on the elaborate
“ system of buried and air lines at a time when most required.
“ It was a common experience both to find these exchanges empty
“ and secondly after communication was established for the exchange
“ to evacuate without warning. If any use of existing systems is
“ to be obtained in above circumstances the control personnel
“ should remain until the last.”

I have not been able to ascertain whether other artillery units had similar experience.

Ammunition.

At commencement of attack there were 500 rounds per 18-pdr. at the guns—other natures in proportion—and all echelons were full. 100 rounds per 18-pdr. and 4.5" how. were dumped in some rear positions.

During moving warfare constant changes of refilling points are necessary and it was considered unwise to have too many rounds at positions and refilling points.

It was decided when retirement began that a suitable disposition of ammunition would be about—

200 rounds per 18-pdr. and 4.5" how. at the guns. Echelons full.
150 to 200 rounds per gun at refilling point.

The ammunition supply worked smoothly and well.

At no time was any unit dangerously short of ammunition and very little was left behind on the ground on retirement—in nearly every case all dumped ammunition was fired away before retirement took place.

A larger proportion of 18-pdr. H.E. was fired than seems justifiable. I have not been able to go into the reasons for this exhaustively but it may be accounted for by the considerable proportion of H.E. with 106 fuzes and also that the hilly nature of the ground caused battery commanders to use H.E. when observation was difficult and the angle of sight unreliable.

About 45,000 18-pdr. H.E. with 106 fuze were used during the 11 days' operations.

The 106 fuze undoubtedly greatly increases the efficiency of 18-pdr. fire at ranges over 4500 yards, but any tendency to use it at medium and short ranges should be checked as its effect in comparison with a well burst shrapnel is necessarily small.

Heavy Artillery.

(a). Organization of the Heavy Artillery operations is shown in Appendix I.¹

(b). Directly the attack commenced it was arranged that as far as possible each division should have a proportion of 60-pdrs. and 6" hows. under its orders.

Thus at the beginning of the retirement—

25th Division	were allotted	2 60-pdr. batteries.
		1 6" how. battery.
19th Division	„ „	2 60-pdr. batteries.
		1 6" how. battery.

9th Division were given direct control of three 6" how. batteries which were in the H.A. brigade affiliated to the division.

The commander of each H.A. brigade was in close touch with the C.R.A. of Division and acted under his orders.

(c). When it became apparent that a retirement would be necessary all natures bigger than 6" how. were withdrawn from action and sent well away to the rear and no effort was made to bring these batteries into action again till the line got more stable. This saved much blocking of roads and complication in ammunition supply.

(d). The 6" hows. which were not attached to divisions remained under command of B.G. H.A. whose H.Q. were always as close as possible to all divisional H.Q. B.G. H.A. could therefore keep in close touch with situation and bring an increased fire to bear on any portion of the front which required it.

This system worked admirably under conditions which obtained.

(e). On 33rd Division taking over a sector of the Corps front 2 batteries 6" hows., under senior battery commander, were allotted to the division.

On 34th Division coming under the orders of the IX. Corps Heavy Artillery support was arranged by B.G. H.A. with batteries under his command.

It was found impossible to allot a H.A. Brigade H.Q. to 33rd Division or specific batteries to 34th Division—in the former case because no H.Q. was available and in the latter case because it would have reduced the batteries remaining under the orders of B.G. H.A. to a dangerous minimum.

IX. Corps H.A. H.Q. kept in close touch with 34th Division and the H.A. support worked smoothly.

(f). This system of decentralization of the Heavy Artillery worked well and seems the only practicable one—the constant breakdown of communications making it impossible for B.G. H.A. to give quick and effective H.A. support to divisions, especially if the front of the corps is at all a wide one.

Control of Fire.

(a). Control of fire was under Divisions and B.G. H.A.

G.O.C. R.A. interfered as little as possible beyond seeing that

¹ This Appendix showed 3 groups (of 2 or 3 brigades) of field artillery allotted to cover the 25th, 19th and 9th Divisional fronts and 4 brigades of heavy artillery containing respectively 5, 6, 6 and 7 batteries.

movements, fire, and use of reinforcements were carried out on proper principles. Counter-preparatory bombardments and harassing fire by day and night were ordered but their time and amount of ammunition to be used was left to the divisions.

(b). G.O.C. R.A. or S.O. R.A. visited C.R.A.'s and B.G. H.A. daily and full touch was kept with the situation.

(c). Long range harassing fire was under Corps control.

Counter Battery.

Counter Battery work was only carried out when good targets presented themselves—very little area neutralization was attempted.

When a hostile attack is launched or imminent the all important target, on which the fire of every possible gun should be directed, is the enemy infantry. This fact appears an obvious one, but I do not think it is perhaps sufficiently appreciated by some heavy gunners who during trench warfare are inclined to get a distorted view of the importance of counter battery work.

During a moving battle I think the C.B.S.O. and his staff can be most usefully employed in organizing a service of information by means of Field Survey posts and counter battery O.Ps. and distributing the information to divisions, etc. By this means he not only performs useful work at the time but also keeps track of hostile batteries with the view of restarting regular counter battery work as soon as the line becomes stable.

Wireless.

During the operations one aeroplane was always available for work with the artillery—L.L., G.F. and N.F. calls were the only calls sent.

All masts were installed by H.A. and D.As. but owing to misty weather not many calls were sent, though records of some effective L.L., G.F. and N.F. calls were received.

Administrative Arrangements.

Report on Administrative arrangements is attached.¹

French Artillery.

During the latter part of the period under review numerous batteries of French artillery—principally 75-mm. but also 155-mm.—came into action on IX. Corps front. No notification of the arrival of these batteries was sent to IX. Corps nor were they in any way under IX. Corps orders—facts which militated against the most effective use being made of their fire. Immediately the presence of these batteries was detected every effort was made by the use of liaison officers and hastily established communications to employ them to the best advantage and to keep them au courant with the tactical situation.

I am strongly of the opinion that reinforcing artillery should be placed under the orders of the Corps holding the sector, who can then allot them to divisions as required.

¹ Not reproduced.

Conclusion.

(a). The whole of the artillery work throughout the period worked well and smoothly and there was no hitch of any sort.

(b). Ammunition supply worked particularly well and reflected great credit on the " Q " arrangements and the efforts of the M.T. personnel. It was unnecessary for corps to fix any limit to the expenditure of ammunition.

(c). Throughout the period the morale of officers and men remained very high. The men had plenty of food and water and though work was continuous the arrangements for resting personnel were satisfactory and fire very rarely deteriorated from fatigue of detachments. Reports of short shooting were very few.

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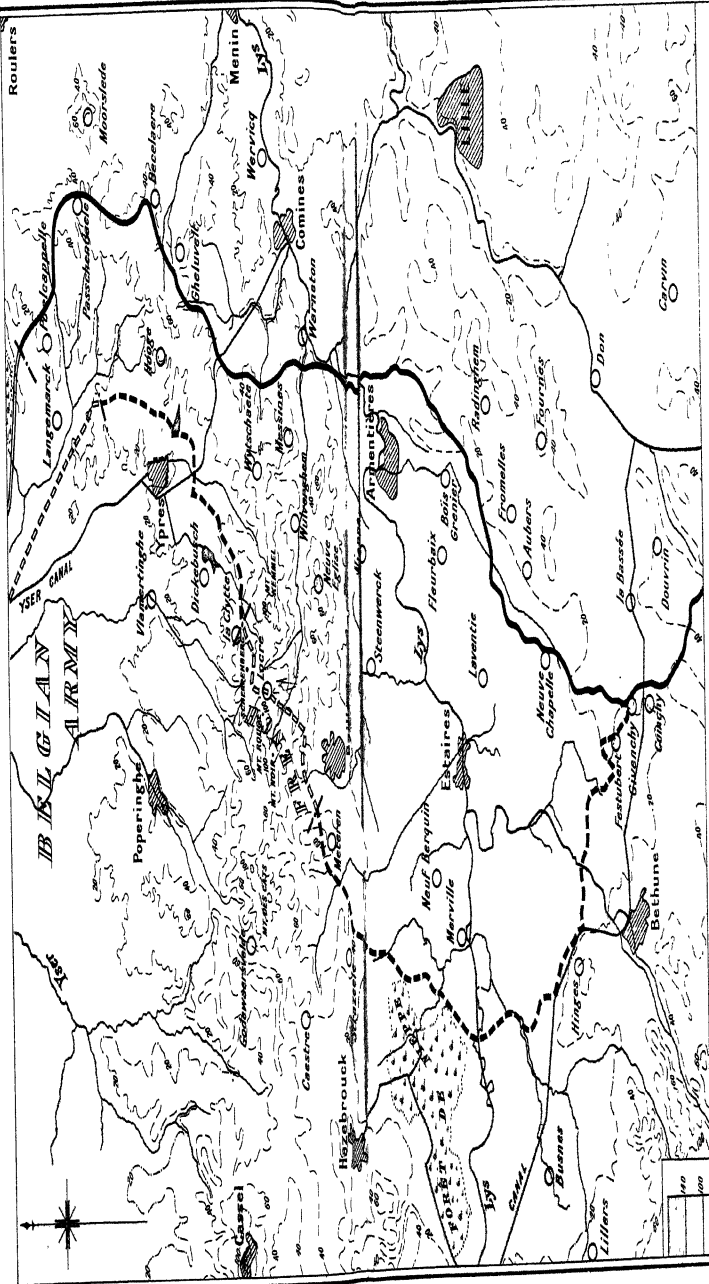
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